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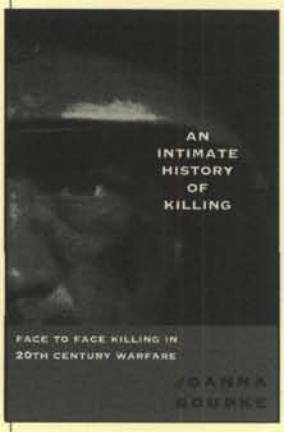

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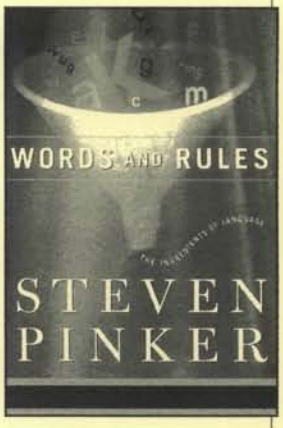

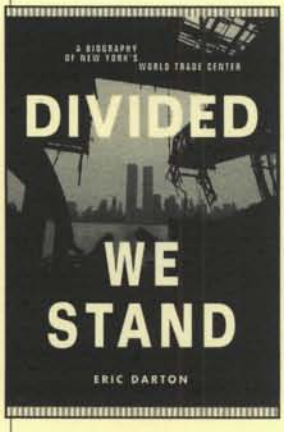

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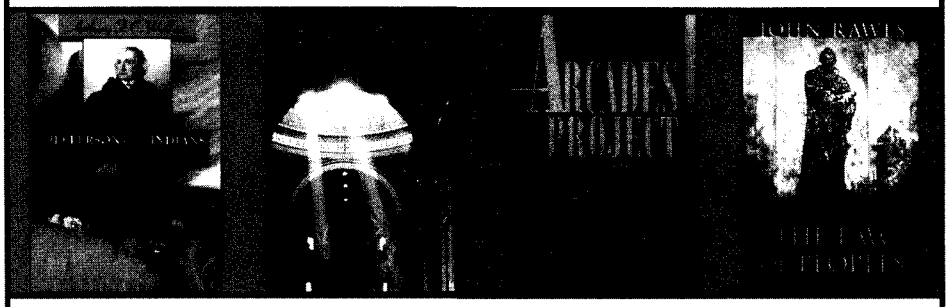

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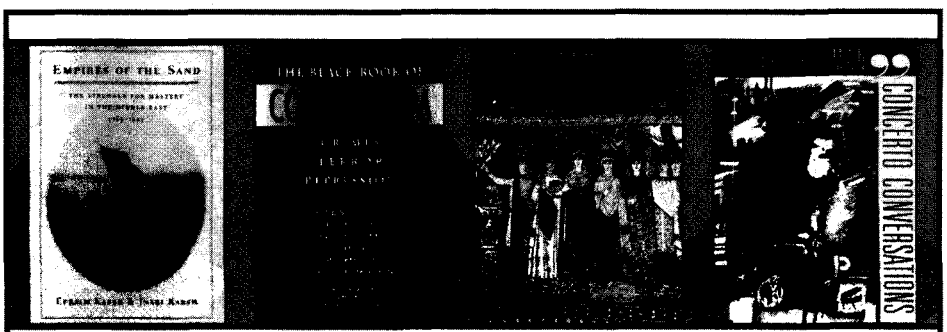

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Art as It Is Made

THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR greets the twenty-first century with an essay on the most important cultural movement of the twentieth. Its author is the historian Jacques Barzun, who has not just studied Modernism; he has lived it. In 1956, in his introduction to *The Energies of Art,* Barzun wrote:

> To be born near the beginning of the decade before the first world war and at the center of the then most advanced artistic activity in Paris is an accident bound to have irreversible consequences on the mind. The first pictures seen: Cubist; the first music heard: Stravinsky's *Sacre;* the first poetry and drama: Futurist, Simultanist, "experimental," like the first new building visited, which was Auguste Perret's "modernistic" skyscraper apartment, rue Franklin—all this, thanks to childhood's uncritical acceptance of the given as normal, could not help forming the most natural introduction to art as it is made.

Barzun's father was the avant-garde French poet Henri Martin-Barzun. Through the family's house in Paris passed Pound, Cocteau, Marinetti, Varèse, Brancusi, Kandinsky, Léger. Young Jacques played at Duchamp's studio; Marie Laurencin sketched his portrait. "While I was sitting on Apollinaire's knees," recalls Barzun, "he once said to me, 'you see, I can make a word mean anything I want. You see this blotting paper on the desk? I call that an archipelago!'"

One of the "irreversible consequences" of Barzun's early marination in avant-garde culture is "The Artist as Prophet and Jester," a critical history of Modernism peopled by many of the characters who, more than eighty years ago, dropped by the Barzun house for sandwiches and beer. It is adapted from a chapter in *From Dawn to Decadence: 500 Years of Western Cultural Life,* to be published this spring by HarperCollins. Though the book was a mere ten years in the making, it had been in the back of Barzun's mind for more than six decades. "When I was twenty-nine or thirty," he says, "I was asked to write a cultural history of Europe since 1789. A friend of my father, an historian, told me, 'Don't write a big, big book until you're about eighty.' I brushed that off as just an old man's view of things, but he was right. If you write a book like this when you're young, it's all secondhand. You haven't read enough of the works to form your own opinions, and you're doing it, as it were, empty-handed or empty-minded."

I doubt that Jacques Barzun was ever empty-minded, even *in utero,* but I am nonetheless glad he waited.

A. F.

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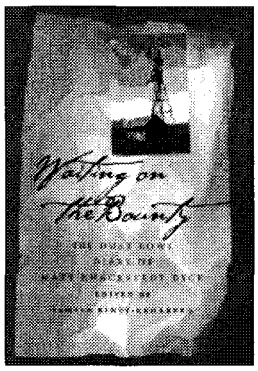

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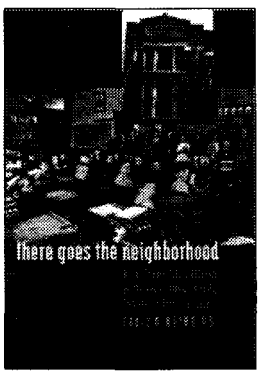

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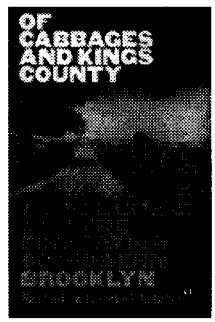

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AT LARGE
AND
AT SMALL

Mail

PHILONOË

Some years ago, my parents lived at the top of a steep hill. My father kept a pair of binoculars on his desk with which, like a pirate captain hoisting his spyglass to scan the horizon for treasure ships, he periodically inspected the mailbox to see if the flag had been raised. When it finally went up, he trudged down the driveway and opened the extra-large black metal box, purchased by my mother in the same accommodating spirit with which some wives buy their husbands extra-large trousers. The day's load—a mountain of letters and about twenty pounds of review books packed in Jiffy Bags, a few of which had been pierced by their angular contents and were leaking what my father called "mouse dirt"—was always tightly wedged. But he was a persistent man, and after a brief show of resistance the mail would surrender, to be carried up the hill in a tight clinch and dumped onto a gigantic desk. Until that moment, my father's day had not truly begun.

His desk was made of steel, weighed more than a refrigerator, and bristled with bookshelves and secret drawers and sliding panels and a niche for a cedar-lined humidor. (He believed that cigar-smoking and mail-reading were natural partners, like oysters and Muscadet.) I think of it as less a writing surface than a mail-sorting table. He hated Sundays and holidays because there was nothing new to spread on it. Vacations were taxing, the equivalent of forced relocations to places without food. His homecomings were always followed by day-long orgies of mail-opening—feast after famine—at the end of which all the letters were answered; all the bills were paid; the outgoing envelopes were affixed with stamps from a brass dispenser heavy enough to break your toe; the books and manuscripts were neatly stacked; and the empty Jiffy Bags were stuffed into an extra-large copper wastebasket, cheering confirmation that the process of postal digestion was complete.

"One of my unfailing minor pleasures may seem dull to more energetic souls: opening the mail," he once wrote.

> Living in an advanced industrial civilization is a kind of near-conquest over the unexpected. . . . Such efficiency is of course admirable. It does not, however, by its very nature afford scope to that perverse human trait, still not quite eliminated, which is pleased by the accidental. Thus to many tame citizens like me the morning mail functions as the voice of the unpredictable and keeps alive for a few minutes a day the keen sense of the unplanned and the unplannable. The letter opener is an instrument that has persisted from some antique land of chance and adventure into our ordered world of the perfectly calculated.

What chance and adventure might the day's haul contain? My brother asked him, when he was in his nineties, what kind of mail he liked best. "In my youth," he replied, "a love letter. In middle age, a job offer. Today, a check." (That was false cynicism, I think. His favorite letters were from his friends.) Whatever the accidental pleasure, it could not please until it arrived. Why were deliveries so few and so late (he frequently grumbled), when, had he lived in central London in the late seventeenth century, he could have received his mail between ten and twelve times a day?

We get what we need. In 1680, London had mail service nearly every hour because there were no telephones. If you wished to invite someone to tea in the afternoon, you could send him a letter in the morning and receive

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his reply before he showed up at your doorstep. Postage was one penny.

If you wished to send a letter to another town, however, delivery was less reliable and postage was gauged on a scale of staggering complexity. By the mid-1830s,

> the postage on a single letter delivered within eight miles of the office where it was posted was . . . twopence, the lowest rate beyond that limit being fourpence. Beyond fifteen miles it became fivepence; after which it rose a penny at time, but by irregular augmentation, to one shilling, the charge for three hundred miles. . . .There was as a general rule an additional charge of a half-penny on a letter crossing the Scotch border; while letters to or from Ireland had to bear, in addition, packet rates, and rates for crossing the bridges over the Conway and the Menai.

So wrote Rowland Hill, the greatest postal reformer in history, who in 1837 devised a scheme to reduce and standardize postal rates and to shift the burden of payment from the addressee to the sender.

Until a few years ago I had no idea that if you sent a letter out of town—and if you weren't a nobleman, a member of Parliament, or other VIP who had been granted the privilege of free postal franking—the postage was paid by the recipient. This dawned on me when I was reading a biography of Charles Lamb, whose employer, the East India House, allowed clerks to receive letters gratis until 1817: a substantial perk, sort of like being able to call your friends on your office's 800 number. (Lamb, who practiced stringent economies, also wrote much of his personal correspondence on company stationery. His most famous letter to Wordsworth, for instance—the one in which he refers to Coleridge as "an Archangel a little damaged"—is inscribed on a page whose heading reads "Please to state the Weights and Amounts of the following Lots.")

Sir Walter Scott liked to tell the story of how he had once had to pay "five pounds odd" in order to receive a package from a young New York lady he had never met: an atrocious play called *The Cherokee Lovers,* accompanied by a request to read it, correct it, write a prologue, and secure a producer. Two weeks later another large package arrived for which he was charged a similar amount. "Conceive my horror," he told his friend Lord Melville, "when out jumped the same identical tragedy of *The Cherokee Lovers,* with a second epistle from the authoress, stating that, as the winds had been boisterous, she feared the vessel entrusted with her former communication might have foundered, and therefore judged it prudent to forward a duplicate." Lord Melville doubtless found this tale hilarious, but Rowland Hill would have been appalled. He had grown up poor, and, as Christopher Browne notes in *Getting the Message,* his splendid history of the British postal system, "Hill had never forgotten his mother's anxiety when a letter with a high postal duty was delivered, nor the time when she sent him out to sell a bag of clothes to raise 3*s* for a batch of letters."

Hill was a born Utilitarian who, at the age of twelve, had been so frustrated by the irregularity of the bell at the school where his father was principal that he had instituted a precisely timed bell-ringing schedule. In 1837 he published a report called "Post Office Reform: Its Importance and Practicability." Why, he argued, should legions of accountants be employed to figure out the Byzantine postal charges? Why should Britain's extortionate postal rates persist when France's revenues had risen, thanks to higher mail volume, after its rates were lowered? Why should postmen waste precious time waiting for absent addressees to come home and pay up? A national Penny Post was the answer, with postage paid by the senders, "using a bit of paper . . . covered at the back with a glutinous wash, which the bringer might, by the application of a little moisture, attach to the back of the letter."

After much debate, Parliament passed a postal reform act in 1839. On January 10, 1840, Hill wrote in his diary, "Penny Postage extended to the whole kingdom this day! . . . I guess that the number despatched to-night will not be less than 100,000, or more than three times what it was this day twelve-months. If less I shall be disappointed." On January 11 he wrote, "The number of letters despatched exceeded all expectation. It was 112,000, of which all but 13,000 or 14,000 were prepaid." In May, after experimentation to produce a canceling ink that could not be surreptitiously removed, the Post Office introduced the Penny Black, bear-

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ing a profile of Queen Victoria: the first postage stamp. The press, pondering the process of cancellation, fretted about the "untoward disfiguration of the royal person," but Victoria became an enthusiastic philatelist, and renounced the royal franking privilege for the pleasure of walking to the local post office from Balmoral Castle to stock up on stamps and gossip with the postmaster. When Rowland Hill—by that time, *Sir* Rowland Hill—retired as Post Office Secretary in 1864, *Punch* asked, "SHOULD ROWLAND HILL have a Statue? Certainly, if OLIVER CROMWELL should. For one is celebrated for cutting off the head of a bad King, and the other for sticking on the head of a good Queen."

The Penny Post, wrote Harriet Martineau, "will do more for the circulation of ideas, for the fostering of domestic affections, for the humanizing of the mass generally, than any other single measure that our national wit can devise." It was incontrovertible proof, in an age that embraced progress on all fronts ("the means of locomotion and correspondence, every mechanical art, every manufacture, every thing that promotes the convenience of life," as Macaulay put it in a typical gush of national pride), that the British were the most civilized people on earth. Ancient Syrian runners, Chinese carrier pigeons, Persian post riders, Egyptian papyrus bearers, Greek *hemerodromes,* Hebrew dromedary riders, Roman equestrian relays, medieval monk-messengers, Catalan *troters,* international couriers of the House of Thurn and Taxis, American mail wagons—what could these all have been leading up to, like an ever-ascending staircase, but the Victorian postal system?

And yet (to raise a subversive question), might it be possible that, whatever the profit in efficiency, there may have been a literary cost associated with the conversion from payment by addressee to payment by sender? If you knew that your recipient would have to bear the cost of your letter, wouldn't courtesy motivate you to write an extra good one? On the other hand, if you paid for it yourself, wouldn't you be more likely to feel you could get away with "Having a wonderful time, wish you were here"?

I used to think my father's attachment to the mail was strange. I now feel exactly the way he did. I live in an apartment building and, with or without binoculars, I cannot see my mailbox, one of thirteen dinky aluminum cells bolted to the lobby wall. The mail usually comes around four in the afternoon (proving that the postal staircase that reached its highest point with Rowland Hill has been descending ever since), which means that at around three, *just in case,* I'm likely to visit the lobby for the first of several reconnaissance missions. There's no flag, but over the years my fingers have become postally sensitive, and I can tell if the box is full by giving it the slightest of pats. If there's a hint of convexity—it's very subtle, nothing as obvious, let us say, as the bulge of a can that might harbor botulism—I whip out my key with the same excitement with which my father set forth down his driveway.

There the resemblance ends. The thrill of the treasure hunt is followed all too quickly by the glum realization that the box contains only four kinds of mail: 1) junk; 2) bills; 3) work; and 4) letters that I will read with enjoyment, place in a folder labeled "To Answer," leave there for a geologic interval, and feel guilty about. The longer they languish, the more I despair of my ability to live up to the escalating challenge of their response. It is a truism of epistolary psychology that, for example, a Christmas thank-you note written on December 26 can say any old thing, but if you wait until February, you are convinced that nothing less than *Middlemarch* will do.

In October of 1998 I finally gave in and signed up for e-mail. I had resisted for a long time. My husband and I were proud of our retrograde status. Not only did we lack a modem, but we didn't have a car, a microwave, a Cuisinart, an electric can opener, a cellular phone, a CD player, or cable television. It's hard to give up that sort of backward image; I worried that our friends wouldn't have enough to make fun of. I also worried that learning how to use e-mail would be like learning how to program our VCR, an unsuccessful project that had confirmed what excellent judgment we had shown in not purchasing a car, etc.

As millions of people had discovered before me, e-mail was fast. Sixteenth-century correspondents used to write "Haste, haste, haste, for lyfe, for lyfe, haste!" on their most urgent letters; my "server," a word that conjured up a delicious sycophancy, treated *every* message as if someone's life depended on it. Not only did it

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get there instantly, caromed in a series of analog cyberpackets along the nodes of the Internet and reconverted to digital form via its recipient's modem. (I do not understand a word of what I just wrote, but that is immaterial. Could the average Victorian have diagrammed the mail coach route from Swansea to Tunbridge Wells?) More important, I *answered* e-mail fast—almost always on the day it arrived. No more guilt! I used to think I did not like to write letters. I now realize that what I didn't like was folding the paper, sealing the envelope, looking up the address, licking the stamp, getting in the elevator, crossing the street, and dropping the letter in the postbox.

At first I made plenty of mistakes. I clicked on the wrong icons, my attachments didn't stick, and, not having learned how to file addresses, I sent an X-rated message to my husband (I thought) at gcolt@aol.com instead of georgecolt@aol.com. I hope Gerald or Gertrude found it flattering. But the learning curve was as steep as my father's driveway, and pretty soon I was batting out fifteen or twenty e-mails a day in the time it had once taken me to avoid answering a single letter. My box was nearly always full—no waiting, no binoculars, no convexity checks, no tugging—and when it wasn't, the reason was not that the mail hadn't *arrived,* it was that it hadn't been *sent.* I began to look forward every morning to the festive green arrow with which AT&T WorldNet welcomed me into my father's "antique land of chance and adventure." Would I be invited to purchase Viagra, lose thirty pounds, regrow my thinning hair, obtain electronic spy software, get an EZ loan, retire in three years, or win a Pentium III 500 MHz computer (presumably in order to receive such messages even faster)? Or would I find a satisfying little clutch of friendly notes whose responses could occupy me until I awoke sufficiently to tackle something that required intelligence? As Hemingway wrote to Fitzgerald, describing the act of letter-writing: "Such a swell way to keep from working and yet feel you've done something."

My computer, without visible distension, managed to store a flood tide of mail that in nonvirtual form would have silted up my office to the ceiling. This was admirable. And when I wished to commune with my friend Charlie, who lives in Taipei, not only could I disregard the thirteen-hour time difference, but I was billed the same amount as if I had dialed his old telephone number on East Twenty-second Street. The German critic Bernhard Siegert has observed that the breakthrough concept behind Rowland Hill's Penny Post was "to think of all Great Britain as a single city, that is, no longer to give a moment's thought to what had been dear to Western discourse on the nature of the letter from the beginning: the idea of distance." E-mail is a modern Penny Post: the world is a single city with a single postal rate.

Alas, our Penny Post, like Hill's, comes at a price. If the transfer of postal charges from sender to recipient was the first great de-motivator in the art of letter writing, e-mail was the second. "It now seems a good bet," Adam Gopnik has written, "that in two hundred years people will be reading someone's collected e-mail the way we read Edmund Wilson's diaries or Pepys's letters." Maybe—but will what they read be any good? E-mails are brief. (One doesn't blather; an overlong message might induce carpal tunnel syndrome in the recipient from excessive pressure on the Down arrow.) They are also—at least the ones I receive—frequently devoid of capitalization, minimally punctuated, and creatively spelled. E-mail's greatest strength—speed—is also its Achilles' heel. In effect, it's always December 26; you are not expected to write *Middlemarch,* and therefore you don't.

In a letter to his friend William Unwin, written on August 6, 1780, William Cowper noted that "a Letter may be written upon any thing or Nothing." This observation is supported by the index of *The Faber Book of Letters, 1578–1939.* Let us examine some entries from the *d* section:

> damnation, 87
> dances and entertainments, 33, 48, 59, 97, 111, 275
> dentistry, 220
> depressive illness, 81, 87
> *Dictionary of the English Language,* Johnson's, 61
> Diggers, 22
> dolphins, methods of cooking, 37

I have never received an e-mail on any of these topics. Instead, I am informed that Your browser is not Y2K-compliant. Your son left his Pokémon turtle under our sofa. Your column is

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23 lines too long. Important pieces of news, but, as Lytton Strachey (one of the all-time great letter writers) pointed out, "No good letter was ever written to convey information, or to please its recipient: it may achieve both these results incidentally; but its fundamental purpose is to express the personality of its writer." *But wait!* you pipe up. *Someone just e-mailed me a joke!* So she did, but wasn't the personality of the sender slightly muffled by the fact that she forwarded it from an e-mail *she* received, and sent it to seventeen additional addressees?

I also take a dim, or perhaps a buffaloed, view of electronic slang. Perhaps I should view it as a linguistic milestone, as historic as the evolution of Cockney rhyming slang in the 1840s. But will the future generations who reopen our hard drives be stirred by the eloquence of the e-acronyms recommended by a Web site on "netiquette"?

BTDT	been there done that
FC	fingers crossed
IITYWTMWYBMAD	if I tell you what this means will you buy me a drink?
MTE	my thoughts exactly
ROTFL	rolling on the floor laughing
RTFM	read the f..... manual
TAH	take a hint
TTFN	ta ta for now

Or by the "emoticons," otherwise known as "smileys"—punctuational images, read sideways—that "help readers interpret the e-mail writer's attitude and tone"?

:-)	ha ha
:-(	boo hoo
(-:	I am left-handed
%-)	I have been staring at a green screen for 15 hours straight
:-&	I am tongue-tied
{:-)	I wear a toupee
:-[	I am a vampire
:-F	I am a bucktoothed vampire with one tooth missing
=|:-)=	I am Abraham Lincoln

"We are of a different race from the Greeks, to whom beauty was everything," wrote Thomas Carlyle, a Victorian progress-booster. "Our glory and our beauty arise out of our inward strength, which makes us victorious over material resistance." We have achieved a similar victory of efficiency over beauty. I wouldn't give up e-mail if you paid me, but I'd feel a pang of regret if the epistolary novels of the future were to revolve around such messages as

Subject: **R U Kidding?**
From: Clarissa Harlowe <claha@virtue.com>
To: Robert Lovelace <lovelaceandlovegirlz@vice.com>

hi bob, TAH. if u think i'm gonna run off w/ u, :-F. do u really think i'm that kind of girl?? if you're looking 4 a trollop, CLICK HERE NOW: http://www.hotpix.html. TTFN.

I own a letter written by Robert Falcon Scott, the polar explorer, to G. T. Temple, Esq., who helped procure the footgear for Scott's first Antarctic expedition. The date is February 26, 1901. The envelope and octavo stationery have black borders because Queen Victoria had died in January. The paper is yellowed, the handwriting is messy, and the stamp bears the Queen's profile—and the denomination ONE PENNY. I bought the letter many years ago because, unlike a Cuisinart, which would have cost about the same, it was something I believed I could not live without. I could never feel that way about an e-mail.

I also own my father's old wastebasket, which now holds my own empty Jiffy Bags. Several times a day I use his stamp dispenser; it is tarnished and dinged, but still capable of unspooling its contents with a singular smoothness. And my file cabinets hold hundreds of his letters, the earliest written in his sixties in small, crabbed handwriting, the last in his nineties, after he lost much of his sight, penned with a Magic Marker in huge capital letters. I hope my children will find them someday, as Hart Crane once found his grandmother's love letters in the attic,

> pressed so long
> Into a corner of the roof
> That they are brown and soft,
> And liable to melt as snow.

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Being born is like being kidnapped. And then sold into slavery.

—ANDY WARHOL,
From A to B and Back Again, *1975*

The life-history of the individual is first and foremost an accommodation to the patterns and standards traditionally handed down in his community. From the moment of his birth the customs into which he is born shape his experience and behavior. By the time he can talk, he is the little creature of his culture, and by the time he is grown and able to take part in its activities, its habits are his habits, its beliefs his beliefs, its impossibilities his impossibilities.

—RUTH BENEDICT,
Patterns of Culture, *1934*

I was born a slave, but I never knew it till six years of happy childhood had passed away. . . . I was so fondly shielded that I never dreamed I was a piece of merchandise, trusted to [my parents] for safe keeping, and liable to be demanded of them at any moment.

—HARRIET A. JACOBS,
Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, *1860*

COMMONPLACE BOOK

Birth

COLLECTED BY
ANDRÉ BERNARD

At this time another priest, named Needham, a devout Catholic who liked to think he could do experiments, was becoming notorious in England and Ireland, claiming that little microscopic animals were generated marvelously in mutton gravy. He told [the Royal Society] how he had taken a quantity . . . hot from the fire, and put the gravy in a bottle, and plugged the bottle up tight with a cork, so that no little animals or their eggs could possibly get into the gravy from the air. Next he even went so far as to heat the bottle and its mutton gravy in hot ashes. . . . He put this gravy flask away for a few days, then pulled the cork—and marvel of marvels—when he examined the stuff inside with his lens, he found it swarming with animalcules. "A momentous discovery, this!" cried Needham to the Royal Society, "these little animals can only have come from the juice of the gravy. Here is a real experiment showing that life can come spontaneously from dead stuff!" He told them mutton gravy wasn't necessary—a soup made from seeds or almonds would do the same trick.

—PAUL DE KRUIF,
Microbe Hunters, *1926*

Compassion and shame come over one who considers how precarious is the origin of the proudest of human beings: often the smell of a lately extinguished lamp is enough to cause a miscarriage. And to think that from such a frail beginning a tyrant or butcher may be born! You who trust in your physical strength, who embrace the gifts of fortune and consider yourself not their ward but their son, you who have a domineering spirit, you who consider yourself a god as soon as success swells your breast, think how little could have destroyed you!

—PLINY THE ELDER,
Natural History, *Book 7, c. 77* A.D.

Her pains came on so fast and strong, that [Augusta, Princess of Wales's] water broke before they could get her out of the house. However, in this condition, M. Dunoyer, the dancing master, lugged her down stairs and along the passages by one arm, and Mr. Bloodworth, one of the Prince's equerries, by the other, and the Prince in the rear, they, with much ado, got her into the coach; Lady Archibald Hamilton and Mr. Townsend remonstrating strongly against this imprudent step, and the Princess begging, for God's sake, the Prince would let her stay in quiet, where she was, for that her pains were so great she could not set one foot before the other, and was upon the rack when they moved her. But the Prince, with an obstinacy equal to his folly, and a folly equal to his barbarity, insisted on her going, crying, "Courage! Courage! *Ah, quelle sottise!*" and telling her, with the encouragement of a toothdrawer, or the consolatory tenderness of an executioner, that it would be over in a minute. . . . At a quarter before eleven [on July

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31, 1737] she was delivered of a little rat of a girl, about the bigness of a good large tooth-pick case.

—LORD HERVEY,
Memoirs of the Reign
of King George II, *1952 ed.*

The act of birth is the first experience of anxiety, and thus is the source and prototype of the affect of anxiety.

—SIGMUND FREUD,
The Interpretation of Dreams, *1900*

Kitty's cable I rec.d yesterday and was speechless for about two hours & then I was speechless as we all had a drink on the head of the kid a boy too & last night's show, I was next to the worst thing that ever went on stage.

—W.C. FIELDS,
letter to his wife, Hattie, on the birth of a son, July 28, 1904

Males invest relatively little with each mating effort, and it is to their advantage to tie up as many of the female investments as they can. This circumstance is reversed only in the exceptional cases where males devote more effort to rearing offspring after birth. Then the females compete for males, in spite of the initial advantage accruing from anisogamy.

—EDWARD O. WILSON,
Sociobiology, *1975*

When the women are readie to travell with Child, they are commonly delivered when they are all alone, their husbands in the fields.... I went to one of the Canariins houses to aske some water, [and] espied a woman alone within the house, tying her cloth fast around her middle, and before her having a wodden trough full of water, where she stood and washed a Child, whereof as then she had newly been delivered without any help: which having washt, she laid it Naked on the ground upon a great Indian Figge leafe, and desired me to stay and she would presently give me water.... I had no desire to drinke of her water, but went unto another to aske water, and perceived the same woman not long after going about her house, as if there had beene no such matter, and the Children are brought up in that manner cleane naked, nothing done unto them, but onely washed and made cleane in a little cold water, and doe in that sort prosper and come up as well as men would wish, or as any Child within these Countries can doe with all the tending they have, and live many times untill they be a hundred yeares old, without any Head-ach, or Tooth-ach, or losing any of their Teeth.

—JOHN HUYGHEN VAN LINSCHOTEN,
Discourse of Voyages
into the East and West Indies, *1598*

Spartan women did not wash their newborn children with water, but with wine, in order to test their temperament. It is alleged that infants subject to epilepsy or of a basically sickly physique, will go into convulsions after contact with undiluted wine.

—PLUTARCH,
Life of Lycurgus, *c. 100 A.D.*

I do not know where I came from. But this I know, that I was welcomed by the tender care your mercy provided for me, for so I have been told by the parents who gave me life according to the flesh, those parents through whose begetting and bearing you formed within time, although I do not remember it myself. The comforts of human milk were waiting for me, but my mother and my nurses did not fill their own breasts; rather you gave me an infant's nourishment through them in accordance with your plan, from the riches deeply hidden in creation.

—ST. AUGUSTINE,
The Confessions, *Book I, 6,7*
(trans. Maria Boulding), c. 400 A.D.

The first child is made of glass, the second porcelain, the rest of rubber, steel, and granite.

—RICHARD J. NEEDHAM,
Toronto Globe and Mail, *January 25, 1977*

The return of my birthday, if I remember it, fills me with thoughts which it seems to be the general care of humanity to escape.

—SAMUEL JOHNSON,
letter to Hester Thrale, September 21, 1773

Although it's generally known, I think it's about time to announce that I was born at a very early age.

—GROUCHO MARX,
Groucho and Me, *1959*

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The Artist as Prophet and Jester

JACQUES BARZUN

Whether or not we need the term Postmodernism to mark our recent sense of cultural change, we are now far enough away from the rise and dominance of Modernism itself for a calm estimate of its effects on society and the individual. This does not require that we judge its worth or choose any movement or artists as those to be preferred by posterity. What it calls for is a willingness to look back with sympathy and to try to find patterns in the welter of persons and events.

Modernism proper began in the early years of this century, in what has been aptly called the Cubist Decade. But this label came with hindsight. In those years it was the previous Symbolist movement, together with the Naturalistic novel, that the public was enchanted with, and the young hotheads who were dismissing both and offering novelty were ridiculed as fakers and fools. Ex-President Theodore Roosevelt voiced the majority opinion when he reviewed the New York Armory Show in 1913 and ascribed its newest paintings to "the lunatic fringe."

The *culture* of Modernism, as against its substance, began later, after the "Great War" of 1914–18; it was a manifestation of the twenties. It was then—to take telling examples outside art—that the general public heard for the first time of Freud and Einstein, whose radical innovations also belong to the Cubist Decade. Another essential change was due to a casualty of the Great War that has gone unsung, indeed unrecorded: I refer to

Jacques Barzun, critic and historian, is the author of *Music in American Life* and *An Essay on French Verse for Readers of English Poetry*. This article is abridged from a chapter in his forthcoming book, *From Dawn to Decadence: 500 Years of Western Cultural Life*, which HarperCollins will publish this spring.

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the death of the philistine. The event was overlooked, no doubt, because he had never been called a hero, ever, although he was one of a special kind. Surely it took courage of the best mulish sort to make the same protest, generation after generation, on seeing each new school of nineteenth-century art and literature produced and derided, then accepted, and at last exalted and lodged at public expense in museums, libraries, and concert halls.

Philistines were still alive and kicking late in the Cubist Decade; they disappeared into the trenches with everybody else. By 1920, any that survived had been miraculously transformed, not into aesthetes but into trimmers and cowards. To this new breed anything offered as art merited automatic respect and grave scrutiny. If a new work or style was not easy to like, if it was painful to behold, revolting, even, it was nonetheless "interesting." Half a century later, *unless* the reviewer finds it "unsettling," "disturbing," "cruel," "perverse," it is written off as "academic," not merely *un*interesting but contemptible.

The stupid bourgeois had, through the alchemy of war, come out the docile consumer of the mid and late twentieth century. He takes the existence of a mind-twisting avant-garde as much for granted as the earth's being round; it has the status of a holy synod. To say this is not to overdo metaphor. Art has been defined over and over as Man's highest spiritual expression, and in one respect superior to religion, in that it is the only activity that does not lead to killing; it is in fact the redeemer of an otherwise evil affliction, human life. The artist is moreover a prophet in the biblical sense. Long since called "a criticism of life," his work denounces the sins of the social world. This view of the arts, fervently held by their leading practitioners, has come to be accepted by a sizable part of the public, for many of whom it provides a pastime or a livelihood. The pillars of society—business, the church, government—have concurred. It is thus appropriate to date *popular* Modernism from the time of this final victory won by the religion of art in the early 1920s. The message first uttered in the early 1800s, "art for art's sake," finally conveyed to the literate its true sense: "art for life's sake."

Literature is my Utopia.
—HELEN KELLER (1908)

This dating of ecumenical Modernism gets rid of the confusion among the two or three others, while it leaves untouched the traditional use of *Modern* (no *-ist*) for the era since 1500. At that time, *modern* meant *common* in the sense of *voguish* and *recent.* It took a long time for new and common to mean new and *un*common. The early nineteenth century is the pivotal moment. *Modern* was used in a complimentary way by the pioneering Théophile Gautier in the 1830s; *modernité* by Chateaubriand in the 40s. In the 1850s, Baudelaire found it an accepted critical term. A small indication: the French bibliographer Octave Uzanne edited *Le Livre* for many years; in 1890, he renamed it *Le Livre Moderne.* Thanks to this changed view

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of modernity, art joined science in spreading the twentieth-century dogma that latest is best. Modernist Man looks forward, a born future-ist, thus reversing the old presumption about ancestral wisdom and the value of prudent conservation. It follows that whatever is old is obsolete, wrong, dull, or all three.

Such was the deep conviction of some talented young in the 1920s. Unlike the reconstructed philistine, they did not need to subdue the flesh in order to partake of the new and shocking. They had survived the beastliness of the war, a war caused by their stupid or wicked elders. The new life must be free of all the old errors and full of new pleasures. Gaiety was the main item on the agenda, a taking hold of life with both hands, feeling tolerant toward human vagaries (including their own), and under stress showing nonchalance. This last trait is no doubt what Hemingway had in mind when he defined courage as grace under pressure—an odd notion, since physical courage can be ungraceful, ugly, desperate. But applied to moral resistance, the maxim fits the temper here characterized. Given the relaxed situation of the early postwar period, this rejection of the past, coupled with ways of compensating oneself for the recent horrors, was Emancipation with the least effort.

Despite the break in beliefs and feelings, the pause between the Great War and the next saw the progress of three movements that were already prominent in the 1880s and '90s. These late-nineteenth-century beginnings were revolts, too, which is why their continuation fell in with the postwar temper. The 1920s might have completed these earlier purposes if the Second Great War had not taken place and postponed fulfillment until the 1950s and '60s. The three were: sexual emancipation, women's rights, and the welfare state.

Because these were changes in moral, social, and political habits, and the 1920s and 1930s are remembered chiefly for art and frivolity, the fact that this period took the second step toward the mores and politics of the twentieth-century *fin de siècle* has been forgotten. The final, mid-twentieth-century phase of 1890 emancipations has been regarded as so many beginnings.

Early in the Twenties, the young intellectuals were turning excited attention to half a dozen works of literature that deserve to be called defining. Their authors belonged to an older generation, and the works, gestated during the war, dealt with the experience that every living soul had recently undergone. T. S. Eliot's *Waste Land* epitomized by both title and contents the thoughts and feelings of the survivors. The note of desolation is struck in the first line: "April is the cruellest month." From Chaucer to Shakespeare, and from Shakespeare to Browning and Whitman, April had been sung as the gentlest, most welcoming month. Now all that April stands for, particularly the generative force, arouses antipathy; life is abhorrent. *The Waste Land* goes on to record a hodgepodge of facts, ideas,

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superstitions, and interests born or vivified during the ordeal. These were foreshadowed in Eliot's first group of poems, in which "waste land" is the name for the earth and the soul, for what coexists without meaning: art and its nightingales; fragments of cabaret song; Buddhist nihilism; sublime longings ending in vulgar, senseless rhyming jokes; sexuality acknowledged in the mood of revulsion. The disparate images and tones affirm the blurring of all distinctions, the incoherence of the world. By itself, *The Waste Land* was the crystallization of a moment in European culture. There had been none such since Goethe's *Faust* and Byron's *Childe Harold.*

Very different but likewise emblematic, Joyce's *Ulysses* made a saga out of the contrast between the critical consciousness and the inescapable demands of life. The tale begins with a glimpse of the poet, the artist, whose powers keep him a spectator, an alien in the uncaring world. The rest of the odyssey is framed by the next scene and the final soliloquy, both expressions of the physical: in the first, Leopold Bloom is at stool and thinking evacuations; the last shows Molly Bloom thinking sexual organs and intercourse. In between, the spectator trails through that other wasteland called a city. Sordid back streets and busy thoroughfares form the boundaries of modern life. Bald description, satire through parody, and calculated rambling permit nuances within disgust and even, at times, a sad sort of sympathy. The literary innovation borrowed from the obscure French author Edouard Dujardin and called "interior monologue" parallels the "free association" method of curing neurotics.

Two other outstanding works, new in the early 1920s though finished during the war years, embodied its experience by showing former codes of conduct and belief as obsolete and society in decay. These were Shaw's *Heartbreak House* and Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past.* This latter title, attractive as it is for readers of the Scott-Moncrieff translation, misses the point: the original says "in search of lost time," with a play on words suggestive at once of "forgotten days" and "time wasted." The story stresses the evanescence of all things and, in particular, of the social and artistic world that the narrator tries to reconstruct in memory. It is interesting—though largely unnoticed until Charles Scribner Jr. called attention to it—that the recollection includes with respectful attention a good deal of contemporary science, both directly and by way of metaphor.

The length of Proust's novel is a logical consequence of his way of remembering. It too is associative: the famous crumb of tea cake and other similar details make the now-overstated point that the mind is at bottom non-rational. That is also the lesson of the interior monologue, of which Proust makes indirect use. Instead of the non-logical "stream," he created the meandering sentence (in French: *phrase à tiroirs.*) One clause after another is forced into the preceding, the lengthening group somehow harnessed together in a single syntactical unit. It is hard to read and often to understand. It is anti-prose, as the first critics of the work noticed. For

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prose is a highly artificial genre that requires the taming of speechways to attain clarity, and in Proust one is pulled down, below speech, into the wayward flitting of thoughts and images.

The counterargument is that without the wanderings, no impression of search, of difficulty and doubt, would have been rendered. One has only to read Proust's easy, delightful first novel in one volume, *Jean Santeuil,* to see that lucid and rapid discourse was inappropriate to the later work. The pastness of the past—let alone its rediscovery—called for the way he wrote.

Much has been written to the effect that Proust intended a devastating exposure of the upper bourgeoisie and the relics of the nobility in France, making their tastes and their vices look so repulsive that, as in Marx, the upper crust would be blown to bits. This is to mistake portrayal for propaganda. A reading of Balzac's *Comédie Humaine* will show that *his* subject was the tastes and vices of the aristocracy and upper bourgeoisie of his time, and if their descendants were still around for Proust to observe a century later, the chances are that new money and old titles alike survive in spite of revolutions and wars. The question is, with how much authority? What Proust recorded was the passing of an elite, swamped—as Balzac feared—by the fully risen tide of democracy. After 1920, another wave of populism, mightier than the first, swept over Western culture. It arose from the communal experience of war and was accelerated by the Russian Revolution. The people became the sole object of interest and concern. Art, literature, social theory, manners and morals reshaped the common feelings and set the tone of the altered society.

Shaw's *Heartbreak House* gives a more concentrated view of the maelstrom of emotions after the war; a play is always more tightly woven than a novel. As usual, Shaw's mode of edifying is that of high comedy. The people who live in *Heartbreak House* or visit there are, like Proust's, the idle well-to-do, and two or three contrasting types, including a burglar and the mad Captain who owns but cannot run the dwelling he calls his ship: it is adrift. He can only comment on the frivolity of the crew as they make love, quarrel, brag about their prowess, and remain ignorant of the conditions that govern their conflicting beliefs and actions. All but young Ellie, who ages rapidly out of innocence into experience, are as unhappy as they are worthless. The businessman in their midst, like the burglar, knows more of the truths of life, but the motives the pair live by are narrow and destructive of others and themselves. The Captain's acquired wisdom comes out in bursts and sometimes stuns the person addressed; at other times it is dismissed as his madness. In either case it does no good. Maxims in times of danger are useless, experience is incommunicable. The knotted strands of life, desire, assumptions, and moral codes cannot be unsnarled; they can only be cut, which is what happens when an air raid occurs, with a silencing *fortissimo* like the finale of a Beethoven symphony. The two thieves—burglar and businessman—are killed, the survivors exhilarated: they hope

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for another bombing the next day. The allegory is plain. The West has brought on itself the housecleaning its foul habits deserved; whoever looks about him and reflects should welcome it.

One other great figure voiced the same perception, also allegorically: the last of the great poets, Yeats. He had been one of the pensive Symbolists and mystics of the Nineties. Yeats remained a mystic, but age and political responsibilities had turned him into a prophet too, hardening and condensing his language in phrases of which some, such as "the center cannot hold," have become clichés descriptive of "our condition."

Whether or not the younger talents admired any of these older figures, they were driven in other directions by the cult of the new. It was an imperative so ingrained that it was not even discussed: the nineteenth century had seen to it. But in that century, the new was a departure by a number of geniuses who soon generated a school of able exploiters. In the 1920s, originality produced the spectacle of many overlapping styles at once. The apparent gain was an actual loss: it not only deprived the age of what might have been its characteristic style, it also subjected each competing group to the accidents of vogue. By the end of the twentieth century it was commonly said that the lifespan of a style is three months. For such creators the ancient maxim is reversed: life is long and art is short.

The great geniuses of the past still rule over us from their graves; they still stalk or scurry about in the present, tripping up the living, mysteriously congesting the traffic, confusing values in art and manners, a brilliant cohort of mortals determined not to die, in possession of the land.

—WYNDHAM LEWIS (1915)

Why did Modernism not get a single style that would define the *ism* concretely? The answer is not rebellious egotism alone. The burden of the whole past, down to the turn of the nineteenth century—all the masterpieces, great and small—exerted a pressure of paralyzing effect. Everything had been done. Substance and techniques had given all that was in them.

The impetus born of the Renaissance was exhausted, and the new start made in the years just before 1914 had been cut short; its creators themselves were unable or unwilling to pick up where they left off. These facts made the younger talents feel caught in the jaws of history; they must be original, but their heritage stood in the way, and the means of making a new start were denied by the break in culture. They were at a new starting point without the benefit of an uncluttered ground, a clean slate.

The age demanded that we sing and cut away our tongue.
The age demanded that we flow and hammered in the bung.
The age demanded that we dance and jammed us into iron pants.
And in the end the age was handed the sort of shit that it demanded.

—ERNEST HEMINGWAY (1925)

In retrospect, the scattering of their efforts may be grouped into a small number of

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tendencies: One, to take past and present and make fun of everything in it—parody, pastiche, ridicule, desecration to signify rejection. Two, to return to the bare elements of the art and, excluding ideas and ulterior purpose, to play variations on these elements simply to show their sensuous power and the pleasure afforded by bare technique. Three, to remain serious but find ways to get rid of the past by destroying the very idea of art itself.

The enormous sum of talents exerted to carry out the individual programs under these categories fills one with admiration for the undertakers' pertinacity and with sympathy for their historical plight. All alike were doing the work proper to the artist—mirror life as they saw it, respond to its pressure by criticism overt or implied. And clearly, also, their different paths converged on the negatives. Ridicule, denial, anti-art, and sensory simplicity mean that culture and society are in the decadent phase, when it is everybody's duty to do his share of ground clearing. It is a manifestation of Primitivism on a large scale.

It was in the midst of war that a small group of young people inaugurated the first of these modern techniques of destruction by seeming madly irresponsible on purpose. They were in Zurich in 1916, protected by Swiss neutrality but not "above the struggle" emotionally. They chose for their movement of revolt the label "Dada," which is French baby talk for hobby horse. In usage the connotation is double: obsession and mischief. Giving this tag to a new literature signified that it mocked and threw over the set forms and rational language of all previous poetry and prose, together with the conventions of print.

I don't even want to know that any man lived before me.

—ON THE COVER OF *DADA NO. 3*

Every word was wrong; every word was Romantic, banal, probably used by the so-called poets of the nineteenth century. He tried again: ochreous residue, heart's dregs —that was sufficiently unlike Tennyson, but it wouldn't do. Heart was one of the bad old words. But why write about autumn at all—another prohibited word. It all shows how second-rate I am, he concluded.

—GERALD BULLETT, *THE JURY* (1935)

The Dada manifestos were accompanied by poems and prose that made their way across frontiers, so that by 1920, Dadaism, led by Tristan Tzara, was one of the new schools that critics treated with respect. Its productions were often classed as "amusing," but that did not make them any less "important"—destruction by derision is a recognized mode. Its novelty lay in the nihilism of the joke. It was not aimed at particular targets in orderly language; it attacked everything by dislocating everything. There lay the importance of Dada and its analogues in the graphic arts. They gave a new model of total demolition, a fresh impetus to the pre-war Abolitionism of Jarry, Lautréamont, and Marinetti. The point was easy to grasp—a child could understand it.

In that same year, 1916, James Joyce was also in Zurich, studying music with Busoni and intending to be a singer. But he was even then leaning toward literature. His fellow student, the American composer Otto Luening,

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recalls in his autobiography how fond Joyce was of producing verbal glosses on musical works. Whether Dada's way with words in print had anything to do with Joyce's later taking apart and regluing of syllables remains conjecture. If it is only a coincidence, the parallel shows the spirit of the times at work, dismantling linguistic and literary habits. Apollinaire had prayed for a new language, Mallarmé for a new visual layout of ideas, H.M. Barzun for an orchestration of voices. Time and the war translated their desires into an explosion of the dictionary. The pre-war Futurist F. T. Marinetti brought his creed up to date in *Freedom for Words,* listing ten principles that included war on intellect; ending syntax and common spelling; creating the ugly; machinelike living; simultaneous perception; and "the maximum of disorder." Marinetti's "freedom" proclaimed the right, still practiced in some novels and poems to this day, to exploit typography as a means of expressing chaos, disregarding not only the reader's beliefs but also his understanding.

This right acquired a recognized basis when Surrealism came into being under the leadership of André Breton. The Dadaists claimed that they were its progenitors by virtue of their yielding to impulse. The Surrealists had the advantage of being "scientific" about it: they were versed in the nature and workings of the unconscious, and relied on dreams and the phenomenon of automatic writing as the proper groundwork of poetry and fiction. Here was an offshoot of the recently publicized field of psychoanalysis, which seemed to justify abandoning the rational, the coherent, the readily intelligible in literature. Were they not largely absent from everyday life, business, government? Let the ubiquitous Haphazard speak.

Surrealism is pure psychic automatism by means of which is expressed the real functioning of thought—thought dictated without any control over it from reason or from considerations of a moral or esthetic kind.

—André Breton (1934)

This attitude suggests another turn in the theme of Individualism. Each artist cultivates his own garden, psychically speaking, and the reader or beholder uses his own fund of psychic images to interpret what is before him. The critical theory of the 1890s that each work of art is "an autonomous world" validates the practice. From another point of view, such works are also "pure art," because, coming out of the unconscious, they ignore all the meanings of the world. In the domain of spirit and psyche, communication is at a low ebb, its value negligible; it depends after all on conventions, and these are outworn. Non-sense rules the world.

The result is paradoxical but of decisive effect. The artist condemns society by picturing not its follies but its madness. He is the jester whose absurd remarks tell the king what is wrong with his realm. The twentieth-century writer is under no obligation of clear discourse; the language of Dada, like the blur of *Finnegans Wake* and the stutterings of Gertrude Stein, is by nature antisocial. He despises his audience, but claims its attention as the one being who pictures the world as it is. At the same time, the work of art—pure and

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autonomous, not subject to any rules—affirms the artist's unconditional emancipation.

Dada, Surrealism, and their sequels had as a by-product a democratic enlargement of the terms "art" and "artist." Relying on the unconscious simplifies things: the unconscious is by definition neither learned nor thoughtful, and everybody has one; and its deliverances in free associations or automatic writing are exempt from revision, else they would lose their genuineness. Thus the individual artist, not responsible in any direction, is really above criticism. It is a return to the ancient Greek conception of the "genius"—for example, Socrates' *daemon*—as a spirit that lives within and guides the creature without his control.

Of course, the best disciples of Surrealism did more than tap the underground lake of associations driven by instinct, and as a result of their giving their material a tendency, *Surrealist* acquired a narrower meaning, now the only one in common use: anything that causes dismay by violating ordinary experience. And since it seems that the unconscious is a reservoir of horrors, exploring it causes the cruel, the perverse, the obscene—the "sick"—to be increasingly taken for granted as natural and normal. Science fiction and film, as well as novels and the press, keep teasing the mind with the unspeakable, and possibly incite young and old to reenact the deeds in real life. The progress made since the Gothic shudders of the late eighteenth century is manifest.

DADA SONG

An elevator's song
That had dada in its heart
And overtaxed its motor
That had dada in its heart

The elevator
Was carrying a king
Heavy breakable autonomous
He cut off his big right arm
Sent it to the pope in Rome

Which is why
The elevator
No longer had dada in its heart

Eat some chocolate
Wash your brain
dada
dada
Drink some water

When back from the trenches, the painters and musicians of the older generation felt disoriented. The path traced so long ago, in the zeros and teens of the century, had petered out. It was impossible to compose, paint, or sculpt in the old way; equally impossible to start from scratch like a beginner. And since the latest young generation had been deprived of the normal tutelage by and resistance to their immediate elders, those newcomers who were unmoved by Dada were at a loss how to proceed.

As it turned out, these elders tended to leapfrog backward over one or more centuries and draw stimulus from forgotten works. Apollinaire, who returned wounded from the southeastern front, modified his technique and ended up writing poems to his new love in the versification of the mid-nineteenth century. Stravinsky, the star that led the musically advanced before 1914, found themes to inspire him in the work of the early-eighteenth-century composer Pergolesi. Léger and Picasso abandoned their ways of analysis-cum-synthesis and dealt in representa-

Today every composer's overcoat has its corresponding hook in the cloakroom of the past.
—CONSTANT LAMBERT (1934)

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tion and rotundities that negated their previous geometries. For a time it was believed that a sober neoclassicism was under way.

But the winning gamble, the ultra-Modernist note, was struck by Duchamp, also an elder. His temper had been contrary even before the war, from dissatisfaction with himself and his peers. The brilliance of his *Nude Descending a Staircase* has remained a glow in the distance but not a beacon. His far-reaching influence on his contemporaries and successors has come from another signal light: his painting a mustache on a reproduction of the *Mona Lisa.* This coupling of two powerful symbols disposed of the Renaissance and its sequels; it was the counterpart of Dada. Construction was at an end and its opposite had begun.

To mix images, one might say that the mustache opened a door, gave a password, flashed a permanent green light that allowed anything well done with pencil or chisel to qualify as art—or rather, to qualify as fulfilling the collective aim of anti-art. A new term, "free form," summarizes the various techniques used in this emancipation. The creative eye found ways to discern in ordinary objects the "free form" of others, as Arp did in his mustache-hat and mustache-watch. Incompatibles, when fused, spark ambiguous meanings—witness the "free-formers" in words—and ambiguity contributes to disarray.

These departures were matched by the titles of works, also meant to bewilder by being cryptic, visibly irrelevant, or obscene. Everything kept on "amusing" the beholder through the years to come. The stuffed goat with a tire around its middle entertained at the Tate Gallery in London; the ladder against the wall, inviting a walk-through, at the Whitney in New York; the twenty-two oscillating television screens, in South America; the man's gray felt suit on a hanger, in Munich (Duchamp had blazed the trail with a green vest, also on a hanger). These jokes were serious and must be taken so. Helping to destroy a culture is, in fact, no joke if one is bursting with talent and technical skill and must bend them to a sort of reductionism instead of giving their expansiveness free rein. Other artists found less demanding and more direct means of contributing to the common effort. Found Art (jetsam from the beach), Junk Art (the discarded refrigerator door), Disposable Art (objects magnified, or made of flimsy materials; bridges and buildings draped in cloth)—all these told the world that art as an institution with a moral or social purpose was dead.

The same message could be read in aleatory art (based on random points generated by dice or a computer); mobile art, including "sculptures" in the form of small useless machines in purposeless motion, or a pair of shoes that step back and forth; geometrical art (a whole series "exploring the square"), this last opening the way to drawings or photographs of bacteria, snowflakes, or internal organs. The point is: just design, in two dimensions or three, with or without color. Pattern is all—almost any pattern pleases.

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On seeing that painters and sculptors were no longer representing persons or objects, but preferred forms bare of suggestiveness, critics began to speak of Abstract Art. This usage took it for granted that those forms were abstracted, that is, derived from some existing thing in nature. It is an unfortunate label, convenient as shorthand perhaps, but a critical misnomer on several counts. First, it blots out the fact that all art—even literature, oral and written—is concrete, made of matter and nonexistent apart from it. If anyone thinks that music escapes this condition, let him calculate the mass of the air set vibrating in definite shapes during a two-hour concert. Next, the arts that "represent" do so by abstracting, too. No portrait, landscape, or bust duplicates in full what its model offers to view. Lastly, not all the Modernists derived their visual or plastic forms from some part of nature, something seen and then stripped down to its skeleton. Nor can the term properly apply to an abstract idea that the work supposedly conveys. Sir Joshua Reynolds called one of his paintings *The Age of Innocence,* but what we see on the canvas is the figure of a little girl. These distinctions are important because of the genuine Abstraction that science and techne have interwoven with the immediate and palpable in modern life. *That* deserves the name because it pulls away from direct experience—for example, a musical performance live last year and heard, subtly weakened, on tape today.

Duchamp's world of forms was soon supplemented by Dali's, sprung explicitly from Surrealism. He also felt the need to raise a flag by endowing Mona Lisa's upper lip with a facsimile of his own German-Kaiser mustache. For the rest, his representation of things is as they occur—or might occur—in dreams, and preferably in nightmares. The watch bent over the edge of the table cannot be expected, in its uncomfortable pose, to keep good time. But the technique itself is of the very old-fashioned "photographic" kind, much imitated by other Surrealists, who are thereby able to show off their evident virtuosity. Their landscapes, nudes, and still-lifes, including Warhol's justly famous can of tomato soup, are academic art of the best worst kind, and thus make the point that even that despised style is scheduled for perdition.

The imaginative painter's eye and hand found yet another way to enlighten the beholder: make line, color, and texture the sole interest. Pre-war critics such as Clive Bell and Roger Fry had said that this trinity was the only thing to admire in any work, but they had not supposed that it would exclude other elements. Now the program was taken literally. Large panels of "vibrating" colors in graded or contrasted shades—or dots, lines, planes, checkerboards, or unpatterned splotches (some randomly dripped on the canvas)—arrested attention even though they are in essence very still life. The mind and the senses must be led back to their naïve condition to bring high culture back to its first elements.

Finally, the most intense artistic minds took the most direct path. They

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represented on canvas, or in stone, wood, or metal, human beings in dehumanized form—body parts twisted, amputated, emaciated, background and accessories revolting, coloring and texture mortuary. At one exhibition in New York, the artist produced the ultimate model by painting his body green and lying nude in an open coffin. Since then, an English painter has chosen as his medium excrement. They have a good pretext for these offerings in the physical and moral destruction of war. No imagining of disfigured faces and torn bodies and ruined landscapes could rival what firepower does, and it would be but a slight exaggeration to call Picasso's *Guernica* a "realistic" picture.

Given the several ways of Modernist art, it is logical to conclude that the production of things to see and read is not a rare or special gift. It is populistically distributed to all or nearly all. For one thing, some of the genres, such as Found Art, do not require long study or much practice. For another, the unimportance of subject matter eliminates the need for psychological or other truth in the work. In other words, the demand for genius has died out. Accordingly, there have sprouted throughout the Western world a great number of museums, galleries, workshops, sidewalk shows, and government or business programs to exhibit, sell, or send abroad as propaganda the increasing mass of works. This flowering has taken place not only in capital cities but also in modest towns and villages. These new art centers have been seconded by schools, hospitals, and other sources of wall space so as to accommodate children's art, art by the physically or mentally disabled, art by convicts, art by chimpanzees. Art proves also suitable for therapy and for tranquilizing the unruly in prisons and asylums.

In the genres that call for some premeditation, the beholder often finds that appreciation requires some familiarity with the great tradition. Pastiche and parody cannot avoid being Allusive Art, and it loses its point if the target is unfamiliar. Other tendencies also contained echoes of the past, the Modernist mind haunted by it willy-nilly. Picasso, for example, seemed obsessed with Delacroix's *Women of Algiers.* Fifteen times he patterned a work of his own on the Romanticist painting, each more "scribbled over" than the last, but all recognizable. The series might be entitled *The Victory of Duty Over Admiration,* the duty being to erase the past. For another kind of allusiveness, read Balzac's 1847 play, *Mercadet,* and note the recurring line "waiting for Godeau"—a character who is expected to solve everybody's troubles and never appears.

Architects and craftsmen in the decorative arts did not reject their immediate forerunners, possibly because they dealt in objects of public and domestic utility. The former had to house thousands of office workers on narrow plots and built tall towers; the latter graced the period by the brilliant profusion of the *Exposition des Arts Décoratifs* of 1925, postponed ten years by the war. The show made Art Deco an historical term.

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The glass of Lalique, the textiles of Rodier, the tapestries of Lurçat, together with the new forms of chairs and lamps and tables, imprinted the mind's eye indelibly. They reshaped not merely the public's expectations as to household furniture, but gave the idea of design a distinct status and created, as we shall see, a new profession.

This breed of artists arose with Art Nouveau in the Nineties, but Art Deco moved away from fluidity and toward the sterner lines of machinery. Louis Sullivan's doctrine of Functionalism—form follows function—continued to govern Modernist architecture. The doctrine, though fallacious, was productive of much beauty. Function in any artifact is rarely single, and the designer's favoring one function usually means neglecting another: the motor car looks like a turtle to be "aerodynamic"—speed in the wind—but it is anti-functional for the user to get in and out of. So true is this conflict of aims that a new descriptive term has emerged: makers of quite functional devices have had to modify them so as to pacify customers who want them "user-friendly."

Art Deco objects and furniture, smooth in sweeping lines, sharp angles, and low to the ground, were preceded by the radical architecture of the years of the Cubist Decade, also influenced by machine industry. The postwar International Style was ever more geometrical and bare of ornament; it gave the Modernist city block the silhouette of shoe boxes on end. The mass effect was awe-inspiring even when some or all of the separate buildings were by definition undistinguished. One architect only, the Belgian Auguste Perret, the prewar pioneer of construction in glass and concrete, continued to invent ways to give surfaces diversity, by Art Deco decorations and receding or protruding planes. Most other buildings relied on window placement and the feeble effect of modest moldings or timid entablatures at the second-story level. Above, the walls rose flat and gray like so many punched cards.

At the same time, what may be called techne architecture had become a genre of its own and was receiving enthusiastic praise for such masterpieces as the liner *Normandie,* the George Washington Bridge in New York, and the Gateway Arch over the Mississippi at St. Louis. It was characteristic of its novelty that the New York bridge was "saved" by artistic influence from having its metal towers encased in stone panels, as originally planned. Concurrently, people with Art Deco furniture sported an actual valve or gear of polished metal on their mantelpiece.

To justify his monotony in concrete, Le Corbusier, high priest of the genre, said that a house was a machine for living. He built large blocks of workers' housing and a lock-keeper's gate on the Rhine in the same functional (and one would think suicidal) style. When after the Second War the reaction came, helped by the development of new materials and new ways of handling the old, it rejoined the other arts in their defiance of expectation. Churches took on rounded animal forms, and museums

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double-boiler outlines. The latest conception of a luxurious mansion suggests huge rocks in a heap. All proclaim the liberated fancy. To call a house a machine and to make it feel like one by movable partitions, large expanses of glass, and other factory-like features yields Convenience at the expense of Comfort.

To believe that these characteristics of the Modernist arts molded only the souls of the elite is to overlook the fact of "cultural seepage" through advertising, which always borrows from art and intellect; through the highly organized entertainment industry, which translates the new into the popular; and through a self-conscious new activity that some have called the distinctive feature of the age: Design. Owing much to the Decorative Arts Exhibition of 1925, Design had its start early in the Depression years, when a French army captain named Raymond Loewy, residing in the United States and armed with a portfolio, aggressively informed manufacturers that their products were ugly, clumsy, and possibly dangerous. Loewy got commissions to redesign everything from dictating machines to locomotives, of which he made the first streamlined model. Soon, other draftsmen who had encroached on his lucrative practice were streamlining everything in sight, with the result that the outside of what we buy has become more desirable than the article within.

The arts of Modernism have done one more thing; they have played a part in the general relaxation of conduct so widely complained of since the midcentury. The attack on authority, the ridicule of anything established, the distortions of language and objects, the indifference to clear meaning, the violence to the human form, the return to the primitive elements of sensation, the growing list of genres called Anti- (of which the root principle is "Expect nothing"), have made Modernism at once the mirror of disintegration and an incitement to extending it. And all this was going on long before the moral, sexual, and political rebellions that shook the Western world in the 1960s.

Except for a small group, the musicians did not immediately find ways to accomplish for their art what the Dadaists and the architects had done for theirs. This exceptional vanguard, linked to the Futurists, called themselves *Bruiteurs*—noise-makers. Theirs was both the true music of the city and the return to the elemental fact that concussing various materials will create sound. Hence a lifelike polyphony of clangors, interspersed with the chromatic *portamenti* of sirens and the two notes of fire engines. This innovation was recently recalled in anniversary celebrations in Italy and in France; the Futurist effort had anticipated the harmony of shellfire at the front. After the war, a somewhat modified inspiration produced

When George Antheil adds to his score sixteen pianos, an electric buzzer or two, an aeroplane propeller, and a pneumatic drill, he is, after all, providing little more than the average background to a telephone conversation.

—CONSTANT LAMBERT (1934)

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Antheil's *Ballet Mécanique,* and in our time John Cage and others have reverted to the eloquence of pure noise.

Cage denatured the sound of the piano by physical means, presented works consisting of blows on pieces of wood, and in the notable *4'33"* featured a carefully measured silence. These works teach respect for the elements of the art. During the silence all kinds of sounds occur in the hall, a revelation that helps to loosen up the auditor's rigid notions of what music should be; to the composer's ear all sounds are equal. These events inspire the reflection that a good deal of twentieth-century art has been pedagogical: Magritte's painting of a large briar pipe bearing the caption "This is not a pipe"—as of course it isn't—confirms the generality.

From the prewar decade, the musicians of the Twenties inherited the strong belief that the system of tonality was literally played out. The extreme use of chromaticism (using notes outside the chosen scale) had destroyed the value of scale itself as carrier of significance. Recourse to polytonality (two or more scales simultaneously), then to atonality (disregard of the sense of scale), ushered in for music the common Modernist state of complete emancipation. The orchestra also tended to lose its preeminence as an instrument, and small groupings of its constituents were favored, with special emphasis on percussion, which echoed the cacophony of life. But Varèse's subtle and complex *Ionisation* showed that music could not, like words and paint, do without system. Notes by themselves lack the connotations that even a syllable may evoke, or the emotional tone that a line or dab of color may arouse. After a good deal of composing atonally, Schoenberg devised the system called serial (he preferred the term pantonality), which attracted the majority of musicians while repelling most audiences.

The public tried hard; the philistine did not come out of his grave; on the contrary, he kept there his aesthetic distance. The reason for the prevailing demur was that serial composition by means of the "12-tone row" appeals to the mind rather than the ear. It liberated dissonance and demanded of the listener a perceptiveness nothing had trained him for. What the system required was deciding at the outset the only notes to be allowed in the piece, all combinations and permutations being usable. It was a challenge: "see what you can do within these constraints." The scheme was not altogether for creation. Boulez, among others, declared that he was bent on "destroying everything," and he earned critical approval for his "dismantling of music and total reconstruction under new laws."

After the example of Schoenberg, Boulez, Pousseur, and Stockhausen, some serialists came to employ mathematics to ascertain possibilities. It turned out that wider ranges of sounds were available than had been expected. Seeing this, some used computers to make the choices at random—"aleatory music," as in the poetry similarly engineered, or as in painting by dripping pigments. Other composers left the choices to the

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performers, and one at least declared that the result was something not to be called music, but only vibrations. Traditional scoring by conventional signs on the staff sometimes gave way to curving lines—arabesques in different colors—general indications for a semi-improvising performer. The practice of jazz musicians was instanced as a justifying precedent.

The work is made collectively at the moment of its being composed—performed, and henceforth merged in a single creative, quasi magical art. I try to put you, the performer, in tune with the currents that go through me, so that you may be joined to the inexhaustible fount that floods us with vibrations and thereby transmit not a music, but the vibrations that come from a higher region of direct action.

—KARLHEINZ STOCKHAUSEN (1969)

Technique, ingenuity, chance, and the irresistible lure of Scientism displaced the tonally ordered intention of expressiveness. These aspects of the new music resemble Joyce's words made out of other words, the architects' "sculptured" houses, the painters' elaborate geometries, and the sculptors' search for new materials and ready-made items to assemble for "installations." Artists in the 1920s began to speak of their "research" and its "problems," hinting at heroic effort. Like Stravinsky, they confided to the public: "This has been labored over very patiently."

Serial composition does not favor the lyric voice—melody—but the genius of Alban Berg, by using a modified form of the system, did create two operas—*Wozzeck* and *Lulu*—that won over the choosy devotees of that genre. Though not melodic in the *bel canto* Italian sense, the music of these works unmistakably conveys what Berg intended. For the application of the pure system, one must listen to the works of Webern. Characteristically, they are brief; his entire output fits on two small disks.

At one point in the second half of the century, it seemed as if an advance in techne comparable to that which created the nineteenth-century orchestra would inspire composers in new directions. This was the synthesizer, a device by which any note, rhythm, or tone color can be produced in any volume desired, and immediately recorded on tape. It is as if every instrument had unlimited range and power without the help of human lungs and fingers. The machine had a forerunner in the 1930s when Leon Theremin demonstrated how radio oscillations could be controlled by hand to produce "electro-acoustic" music. But his invention found no takers.

Twenty years later, more than one classically trained musician greeted the synthesizer warmly for its flexibility and ease of control. They have used it for effects by themselves or in combination with familiar instruments. This "electronic music," like the percussive genre, enabled the composer to echo the violence and harshness of life. But the Modernist sensibility is disinclined to vastness. Just as poets attempted no large-scale works of public import, cultivating only the personal voice, so composers preferred the small ensemble, often unusual in its instrumental make-up.

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Small works had the advantage of being more likely to be performed. The large orchestras had a set repertoire, and to be played by one of them entailed prohibitive expense, from the printing of parts to the extra rehearsing of a difficult score. And, as in the theater, unionized labor created hurdles along the path between artist and public.

One other musical innovation also bore this restrained character: the solo voice works composed and sung on a 43-tone scale by Harry Partch. They required a few specially built instruments, and the unfamiliarity of both the apparatus and the music kept these cantatas from receiving much notice for a long time. Appreciation is beginning to be shown at the very end of the century, and one much-played composer, György Ligeti, has acknowledged Partch's influence. But the music of Bernard Van Dieren, again sui generis, is still awaiting the serious attention it deserves.

Any contemporary observer of the cultural scene since the Great War knows that it does not appear to him in its fullness and that judgments about any part of it are uncommonly liable to error. The neglect of such composers as Harry Partch and Bernard Van Dieren illustrates the incompleteness; the clash of opinion about Varèse, Stockhausen, Cowell, Carter, Luening, Babbitt, Boulez, Sessions, Wuorinen, and Ussachevsky, and about electronic music shows the danger. This applies to Modernists in every other art. A conscientious critic faces a barrage of views that are tenable—and contradictory; he cannot entertain them all; yet not to choose is to prove wrong.

As for spotting general characteristics, the task is difficult too. A critical term first used about Modernism tells us why: its arts have been promoted and accepted as "experimental." The word stands for endless efforts to be different; it is one of the many misnomers of our time. An experiment is conducted under rigorous conditions; it follows a method, relies on others' most recent research, and is subject to review by peers. The artist's effort is entirely individual and uncontrolled. It is barely trial and error, since there exist no standards by which error can be gauged and a better trial made. What Modernism achieved is no less worthy for the lack of an honorific drawn from the laboratory. It would be better described—and this for more than one reason—as *suggestive* art. (The French slang phrase "launching a balloon" springs to mind.) *Suggestive* would cover the part that was pastiche and parody, the part that appealed by scandal, the part that embodied the obscure hints of the unconscious, and—perhaps clearest of all—the combination of parts that detached emotion from past art. Still, the word "experimental" proved a great convenience as a mind opener. It made the public, inured to science, take the improbable with composure; it kept the lid down on the coffin of the philistine.

But the artists' suggestive efforts did not promote the mission of Modernism unaided. More than ever before, the creators harangued the

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crowd. Theories proliferated; books, periodicals, interviews, catalogues of exhibitions, and program notes explained and justified and made technique preeminent. Inarticulate artists were at a disadvantage and made weak gestures to follow the fashion. If the articulate felt a similar inadequacy when wanting to impress otherwise than by their works, they concealed it in recurrent clichés. Their art was the result of "concentrated study of spatial and linear interrelations" or of "the determination of spaces by their relation to surface and line." When the titles of compositions did not joke or provoke, they expressed the same wish to appear learned, difficult, and scientific: *Investigation No. 12, Structure for Two Pianos, Study in Curves and Squares*—this last rather superfluous. The ancient maxim about art concealing art had lost currency.

Critics and artists who favored the serious, hard-work posture, as against the jokes and mockings, have at times called these last "the sophomoric element" in Modernism. The allegation rests partly on the fact that many of the artists were very young and partly on the quality of the jokes.

Dada was born of a revolt that was shared by all adolescents.

—TRISTAN TZARA (1926)

The rimes and contents of the Dadaists' works were not witty; their ridicule was not sharply aimed or worded with brilliance or originality. Painting the mustache on Mona Lisa can hardly be deemed an inspiration that compels one to go back to it with renewed delight. The same is true of the photograph by Man Ray, rightly regarded as a master, that shows the back of a seated nude woman, decorated with cutouts that imitate the f-shaped holes of a violin, and it holds also for the titles Erik Satie gave his compositions: *Three Pieces Shaped Like Pears, Dried Up Embryos, Things Seen Without Spectacles.* When Duchamp in later years signed a copy of the *Mona Lisa* untouched, he wrote on it: "Shaved." These sallies from artists now in the pantheon call for a few words more.

The term "sophomoric" means wisdom expressed foolishly—or folly wisely. If taken merely as dismissive, the word would not fit the case, for the results of Dada and its continuing animus show that the jesting was not silly but effective. Yet "sophomoric" does apply when one reflects that the mustache and the dorsal violin were intended to be *un*inspired, adolescent—not jokes but japes. The ridicule mocks itself as well as its object. Modernist works of derision did not provoke laughter, and were not meant to. They were mock-funny, which means serious, and those called "amusing" were designed to leave one not smiling but moved to reflection. This is also one's blunted response to the new style of caricature: Paul Klee's or Ronald Searle's differs in this way from that of Daumier or Max Beerbohm.

This muted elation is what the people of the period urged upon one another and boasted of possessing, but misnamed "the sense of humor." It was not the ability to see life as comedy, which needs no special recom-

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mendation. It was the readiness to laugh at oneself when among others, a feat that rarely sparks explosive laughter; it is only self-consciousness made into the habit of self-depreciation. It requires no self-reform, but has its use in forestalling criticism. Such apologies and confessions should not be classed as hypocrisy. Their popularity corresponded to the postwar surge of democratic sentiment, which demands that one continually show awareness of one's limitations. Far from feeling at ease or superior, one reassures others by acknowledging that one is "only human" or "human after all." At the same time, through its connection with the mocking arts, this new sense of humor (it needs a better name) guarantees that the Modernist mind is above all adept at seeing through everything.

JERVIS ANDERSON

1932–2000

Editorial Board member (1976–1981)
and contributor, THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR

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MICHAEL S. HARPER

Ray Brown: "If You Don't Force It"

He's talking about interpolations
riffs that come in in the midst

of action, responding to the line,
accommodating the blues

and not neglecting the melody
refusing to smother beauty

with too many chords
to show off is to bungle

the melody with chordal blocks
not building anything to your baby

hiding the melody
like only the young can do

Lester Young would watch the dancers
moving into his vernaculars

with rhythms augmenting the melody
Herschel would set the pace

Pres would follow
Count would comp time

as though you could improve
on stride piano

Ben Webster could do stride
when you get possessed with wild chords

tie your left hand behind your back
then play the melody with one finger

on your right hand:
put that melody on your heart

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RELEASE: Kind of Blue

8.17.59

Miles (being ahead)
came in early

with the sketches
he did not mention Japanese

visual art
though Bill Evans did

his liner notes
stretching each brush stroke

as metaphor
for playing together

Because you cannot go back
resonance builds

new material
at a recording session

only once
in a lifetime

For these players
five settings

and a figure
who asked of us

to do this
perfectly

as if to play *live*
alone in a group

Miles asked
we answered

Michael S. Harper is University Professor and Professor of English at Brown. He is co-editor, with Anthony Walton, of *The Vintage Book of African American Poetry*. His *Songlines in Michaeltree* (University of Illinois Press) will appear in May of this year.

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O'Keeffe's Barn with Snow

ROY SCHEELE

Start with the clean foundation, blocks of stone,
here on the right forming an underwall
where the foreground slopes suddenly away,
the threshold and the anchor of the scene.
Two drifted sills relieve the wash of grays
that is the barn's near wall, and up above,
but lightly dusted underneath the eaves,
a mow gives on a grainy darkness lit
by shades of brown ascending from within.
The snow defines the sharp edge of the roof.
The back, abutting section, of light gray,
is viewed end-on. Its sills, too, are drifted,
its roof's deep well of shadow overhung
with a red cast reflected from the shed
that stands before it, and the near-wall eaves,
from end to end, with that same red are strung.
Rectangle, pentagram, off-center square,
the shapes conjoin: what's abstract here is real.
Only the near wall's roofline is obscure,
its height of snow touching the cloud above
and melting into it, making one squint
to make it out there, barely, on the left,
the sky's low radiance now nearly one
with the white hush that has descended here.

Roy Scheele, Poet in Residence at Doane College in Crete, Nebraska, has poems recent and forthcoming in *bulb*, *Interim*, *Northeast*, *Pivot*, and *Whole Notes*.

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My Supermarket

TIM MORRIS

I shop every day. Most people don't. The service manager at the supermarket is worried about me. Whenever she looks up, there I am. "We're going to have to get you a job here," she says. "You're here enough."

I didn't use to shop every day. I grew up in a house with an enormous deep freezer. My father would go to the supermarket once a month and return with bags full of cube steak. The meat came wrapped in plastic on styrofoam trays. It was gray in appearance, and when you opened the plastic wrap the underside was even grayer. When he'd unwrapped all the packages, my father would divide the meat into individual serving portions and rewrap it in new plastic. Then he would enclose the plastic-wrapped packages of meat in waxed freezer paper and write the weight of the meat and the date purchased on the paper with a special crayon. When you went to the deep freezer to get meat, you were supposed to select the portion that was oldest and nearest to disintegrating. You thawed it in the refrigerator, and then you unwrapped it and fried it in Crisco for supper.

I guess this is one of those despite-or-maybe-because-of things. *Despite* my early training in food management techniques, or maybe *because of* them, I shop every day now. I married a woman from Ireland and moved to Astoria, Queens, where we shopped at a different market every day to get the exact amount of food we needed for our dinner. The lady at the pasta factory would scoop eight ounces of linguine from a drawer and put it in a paper sack. We'd buy two plum tomatoes and a yellow onion at the corner fruit stand. Next we'd stop at the grocery stall for an anchovy.

Tim Morris is Associate Professor of English at the University of Texas at Arlington. "Puzzlement," his essay on jigsaw puzzles, appeared in the Autumn 1998 issue of the SCHOLAR.

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The man there would take a piece of paper off a big can of anchovies pressed in salt and flick a single anchovy off the top of the pile with a pointed wooden stick. He'd weigh the anchovy solemnly and hand it to us on a leaf of newspaper. Those were good times.

Since then, I have moved to Arlington, Texas, where I teach at the local university. I live here with my wife and son in a subdivision a mile from my supermarket. You are supposed to go there every two weeks and haul home meat for your deep freezer. I go there every day anyway. I can't bear to eat anything out of a freezer. Mine contains two bags of ice, one frosted-over corn dog, an empty carton of green-tea ice cream, and my latest book manuscript. My mother taught me that even if your house burns down your freezer will not, and you should save book manuscripts in the freezer. When I take the manuscript out to revise it, it is chilly and a bit damp. It feels like oatmeal icebox cookie dough.

I ought to get frozen meals and microwave them. But my microwave cut out a year ago. I left its shell hanging on the wall. It's a handsome microwave with a sleek control panel. I like to run my fingers over the touch-sensitive areas for Bake, Broil, Brown, and Hold, none of which I ever used. The only thing I ever made was popcorn. I loved to see the bag inflate and burst open in a cloud of dangerous steam. It cost seven times as much as ordinary popcorn, but the excitement was worth it.

Our supermarket opened a year ago. All the carts were new. They were silky smooth. They glided over the tiled floors without a sound. You could forget you were pushing them. Now, after a year of rattling over the speed bumps in the parking lot, they are noisy. Their wires are coming unwelded. The bloom is off the rose.

I always roll around the store in the same direction. This is so I don't forget anything. Once I get the cart, I enter the front doors and turn right, toward Produce. Then after a sweep around Fresh Meat, I trundle into Bacon, keeping open the option of dipping into School Supplies or Hair Care. Then it's into the main aisles in a weaving, doubling-back pattern. I thread through Salad Dressing, Mexican, and Chili and come out into the fresh-smelling territory of Detergent.

The aisles have strange names. They seem out of proportion to the importance of the items stored there. We have a whole Syrup aisle. We have an aisle for Packaged Pasta, which implies that somewhere else in the store pasta is rolling around loose for the taking. Diapers have an aisle named for them, but adult incontinence products reside on an aisle that is nameless. Cones and Toppings is a major aisle. There is an aisle called Seasonal and another called Seasonings. My favorite aisle, right next to Cereal, is Bars and Tarts. That's a hard-boiled aisle.

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I have to reach Milk last. If you take the milk out of the cooler first, and walk around the store with it as you're doing the rest of your shopping, the milk will start to go just ever so slightly sour. You have to leave the least possible amount of time between the moment the milk leaves the supermarket cooler and the moment it enters your home fridge. You have to get the most perishable things last.

I am a park-it-and-walk cart driver. I leave the cart at the end of an aisle as I collect what I need. Most people don't do this. They take the cart with them into every corner of the supermarket. From the moment they're in the door till they close the trunk on their grocery bags, they keep their forearms lightly in touch with the push-bar of the cart.

The service manager is a funny person. Yesterday she seemed interested in why I came into the store so much. She seemed concerned that I had no life. Today she doesn't seem to remember who I am. I make eye contact with her and smile; she looks past me into the middle distance. Her arms swing like pieces of machinery as she scans my groceries.

The supermarket is a tenuous, ephemeral community. I see these people more than almost anyone else, more than most of the people I work with. Sometimes we hold long conversations about how to cook something. And then, a week later, if you try to continue the thread, they look at you with incomprehension.

Another day I walk up to the customer service desk to cash a check, and someone I don't recognize says, "Hello, Mr. Morris, how are you this morning?" I stare back with my own incomprehension. How has my existence registered on this stranger? Have I woken up famous? Do other people know something about me that I should know?

I feel waves of desire. Desire to be known alternates with the panic of being known. These people know everything about me: what I eat, what I read, what I wipe my behind with. They know what sweets I can't resist buying. They know what rotten, inadequate food I buy when I can't face the effort of cooking something nutritious. Or possibly they think that canned micro ravioli are highly nutritious. They are, after all, 97 percent fat free. I look at my ill-advised shopping decisions cascading down the conveyor belt, and I feel a great need to explain. If I explain myself, Service Manager, could you, would you, understand?

My supermarket plays music constantly. If I remember correctly from college psychology classes, they do this in order to put you in a good mood to buy things. "She'll carelessly cut you and laugh while you're bleeding," wails the singer. That doesn't do the trick. I drop a bag of pretzels into my cart, smashing the ones at the bottom of the bag. The music changes as I swing into Housewares. Now it's Carly Simon singing

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"Every Time We Say Good-bye." How strange, the change from major to minor every time I turn out of Frozen Pizza into Box Juice.

On weekends our supermarket gives away samples. Elderly women come in with electric frying pans and fix frozen chicken entrées. They cut the food into tiny portions and spoon it into little plastic cups. "It's only 179 calories, just $1.99 for a 4-ounce serving, and we have a store coupon good today for 55 cents off your purchase." They hand you the plastic cups along with a tiny plastic spork and a paper napkin. I spoon chicken into my mouth. It tastes like warm glue. The women remind me of museum docents. They are so knowledgeable and friendly. "These fossils are 89 million years old and were found in the chalk beds of the Paluxy River. They are two for the price of one today with the manufacturer's rebate coupon. One hundred percent of your daily Cretaceous Period."

It really does move slowest. You know, whatever line you're in. I spend a lot of time handicapping the checkout lanes. Number seven has one person in line, with a lot of groceries, but they're mostly paper goods and cereal. They'll check through quickly. Much better than number five, where three people have small orders full of strange produce that will defy the checker's knowledge of price codes. I move to number seven and start unloading my cart, when I hear from above the most chilling of phrases: "Service Manager to register seven." The computer is fatally jammed. Two minutes pass, three minutes. Finally the service manager arrives. In one motion she produces a fan of keys and twists one in a lock. The computer jolts back into life.

The service manager never refuses to help a checker. She never turns up and says, "You've done something wrong. I really cannot allow this." She simply materializes, twists the key, and sets the world right again. Why does she need to do this? Shouldn't she be exercising more supervisory judgment? Shouldn't she manage the service, instead of simply being a human key ring? I think of asking her, but she has disappeared, in a clatter of heels, to some other register.

Either I buy strange things, or the grocery literacy of the average checker is low. The checkers perform wonderful operations with computers and price codes and math, but they are stupefied by the sight of a fresh vegetable. "Do you know what this is?" asks one, cupping an eggplant in her palm and frowning at me. I feel I've done something naughty, selecting an eggplant. Then I realize that she just wants me to tell her the name of the vegetable, since she has never seen one before. "What do you do with these?" asks another checker, holding an artichoke at arm's length as if it might go off. That's a reasonable ques-

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tion. I should probably head for home and throw the artichoke straight into the garbage for all the success I'm going to have at transforming it into food.

Paper or plastic, the eternal question. There are two kinds of people in the world, paper and plastic. They all know what they want, but I feel ambivalent. I try to anticipate what the sacker wants. If I say "paper," will he be disappointed in me? If "plastic," will he disapprove? I so desperately crave approval. I feel like saying, "You decide." But that's like telling your significant other, "Oh, anywhere," when she asks where you'd like to eat on your anniversary. They want you to decide, and to decide correctly. "Paper," I venture. Something breaks within the sacker's soul. I've said "paper," and now he has to lean down, unfold a paper sack, and lift the glass milk bottles up over its sharp, serrated brim. He sulks. We have not hit it off well.

It is a little-known fact that when you have a really, really good double-cents-off coupon, you can sometimes save money by buying a smaller size product that is more expensive per unit size than by applying the coupon to a large economy size. I can prove this mathematically. Say the 10-ounce size costs $1.00 and the 15-ounce size costs $1.20. You should buy the 15-ounce size. But I have a coupon worth 45 cents, doubled, which makes it 90 cents. Ten ounces now costs me a dime, but 15 ounces will cost me 30 cents—half again as much product, but three times the price. I should get the smaller size.

I am proud of having the skills to figure this out. Is this what folks like William Bennett mean when they insist that people should acquire a liberal education?

Supermarkets have taken over the world in the last twenty years. When I was first married, traveling the world in the extreme cut-rate version of my own Grand Tour, I learned to shop in other countries. In Dublin, my wife's home city, we would walk from her parents' house to the shop where she had bought sweets when she was a child. I loved the butchers who set out trays of organ meat every Thursday—slaughtering day, so the liver and kidneys were fresh, unlike the awful leathery liver my father would buy and stock in his deep freezer. In Florence I would take my handful of *lire* and bustle through the medieval streets picking up things like *un etto di burro,* miniature treasures of freshness and personal service.

One day in Florence I got a hankering for American cereal. I found a tiny grocery that sold Sugar Pops. Suddenly my Italian experience was complete. The Uffizi, the Ponte Vecchio, and a big box of Sugar Pops. I snatched it off the shelf. The grocer beamed at me. The other customer

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in the shop was a helpful American. "He wants 2,200 lire for them," she advised me. "That's rather a lot of money." I glared at her. I had been living on that inhospitable continent for months, eating breakfasts with things like smoked fish and olives and hazelnuts in them. Nothing was going to stop me from eating cereal now that I'd found it.

Today, though, the American-style supermarket and its attendant cereals are everywhere. In Ireland, SuperQuinns have replaced the corner shops. They are indistinguishable from Safeways. No more kippers or black and white pudding or fresh sweetbreads. Brown meat from dubious countries of origin fills the refrigerated counters, and it's pointless to search for a fresh kidney even on Thursday.

One of the checkers at my supermarket looks exactly like Monica Lewinsky. This makes sense to me because I can clearly recall a tabloid headline, when the scandal was nearing its height, that read MONICA DISAPPEARS. She's done it well. Nobody is going to look for her in Arlington, Texas. I want to chat with Monica as she checks my groceries. I want to ask her if she really thought that Bill, after divorcing Hillary, would retire with her to a double-wide in Hot Springs. But I'm too shy. I keep silent. Monica twists the necks of my two-liter pop bottles over the scanner and lets them bounce down the conveyor belt on their sides to the sacker.

The Muzak is playing "The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald." It is suddenly very, very cold in the rooms of the ice-water mansions. Frozen Desserts and Novelty Pops take on a haunted quality. Dead men's faces lie just behind the Fudgsicles.

The woman in line ahead of me is talking on her cell phone. "Yeah, cuz then you know what they did, they broke my window. They broke my window and they stole my stereo and all my CDs. So I had to go over and buy a new stereo." She pauses to hear commiserations. "Yeah, well it's just my lucky day because then my car breaks down." The guy at the register is scanning her coupons. She has about a hundred. The value of every one is tripled automatically by the computer. I watch the balance of her order drop from a hundred dollars to fifty, to thirty, to ten. The coupons dwindle. Will she make it to zero? As the sacker puts the last of a huge order into her cart, the final coupon beeps through. She owes sixty-four cents.

They have great books in my supermarket. I buy a lot of books there. They have novelizations of movies. They have a novelization of *Little Women*—not the book by Louisa May Alcott, but a full-length novel based on the movie with Winona Ryder. Just like *Little Women* except easier to

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understand, because it's not written in that Old English that the original book used. There are romances and Westerns. There are always several books about the Dallas Cowboys. At Christmastime they have the *Dallas Cowboys' Wives' Cookbook,* as if being married to a linebacker makes one a dab hand at mince pies and sherry trifles.

They sell lots of true crime, a genre that has become rather specialized since *In Cold Blood.* It used to be that murder was enough to sell a book. Now it has to be a high school teacher who hired her student lover to kill the local dentist who had impregnated her while cheating on his invalid wife who was the millionaire daughter of a prominent businessman who was a secret Satanist. This sometimes gets too confusing to describe adequately on the cover of the book, so they make do with a splashy graphic that says SIXTEEN PAGES OF SHOCKING PHOTOS INSIDE. You open it up and flip to the pictures. They display shocking things like a car parked outside a house. A wrench. Somebody's high school yearbook photo. So that was the point of those awful yearbook photos. When you are brutally murdered, or when you brutally murder somebody else, people can look at the photo and shake their heads over innocence gone wrong.

Sometimes I elbow the sacker out of the way and take charge of sacking my own groceries. I do this not only on the general principle that neither of my arms is broken, but also because of a certain cultural training. In New York, you sacked your own groceries, or you waited, staring into the vacant wells of the checker's eyes, till you eventually got the message that nobody was going to help you. In Texas, however, service is our reason for being. We delight in being subservient. If we didn't make obeisance to one another all the time, sir-ing and ma'am-ing, we'd have nothing to complain about, since the weather is great and we don't pay state income tax.

Frankly, I also sack my own because I am better at it than anyone else. I can get it all in one bag. I put heavy objects at the bottom and frame the cargo space with stable items like cereal boxes. I nestle fresh figs and flowers in protected cavities, and float bags of potato chips on top. My work is my art. Sometimes I have to fight with an aggressive but underexperienced sacker for the chance to help myself, to create another ephemeral but beautifully efficient grocery sack. Then I go home and dismantle my *chef d'oeuvre* within minutes of creating it. I am the Penelope of the supermarkets.

There are too many products. I can't keep up. The pressure is relentless. There used to be two kinds of peanut butter: creamy and chunky. Now there's creamy, chunky, honey nut creamy, honey nut chunky, reduced fat creamy, reduced fat chunky, reduced fat honey nut

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creamy, reduced fat honey nut chunky, sugar-free creamy . . . you get the picture. They crowd each other out of the Peanut Butter aisle. You reach distractedly for what you hope is ordinary creamy, but when you get home you find you've purchased reduced fat jalapeño honey nut salt-free whipped chunky. This increases the amount of stress in your everyday life.

When my wife first came to America, in her twenties, after years of shopping every day in the tiny markets of Dublin, it was the plethora of products more than anything else that gave her culture shock. One day she went to the supermarket to buy a box of cereal. All she wanted was Weetabix. And then the Cereal aisle hit her, full force. Twenty yards of Snaps and Krispies and Smacks grinned off the shelf at her. Their cartoon mascots leered from the boxes, taunting her with the greatest embarrassment of riches that our culture has to offer: three hundred different ways of putting grain and sugar into a cardboard carton. She stumbled halfway down the aisle, cleared a space on the lowest shelf between the Cornflakes and the Shredded Wheat, sat down, and wept.

A thing that is both good and bad about supermarkets is that you can stand in one place as long as you want and look at the products. You don't have to ask anyone for anything. When I was six years old, in Chicago, my mother sent me to the corner delicatessen. I was supposed to buy mayonnaise. "Get any kind of mayonnaise you see," she instructed me, "just don't get Miracle Whip." I walked quickly to the delicatessen, repeating my instructions so I wouldn't forget them. "Not Miracle Whip, not Miracle Whip." When I got to the shop, all the products were behind the counter. The deli man asked what I wanted. "Not Miracle Whip," I said. He couldn't hear the first word. He got out a jar of Miracle Whip. I didn't dare contradict him. I paid for the jar and brought it home. When my mother opened the bag, she started to scream at me. "The one thing I asked you not to get! Why do you go and bring home the ONLY GODDAMNED THING I ASKED YOU NOT TO GET?" I had no answer.

Nobody likes running into people in the supermarket. It is the great cultural reducer. There goes the local rabbi, in his sweat suit. The Provost of the University, in shorts and a T-shirt that says "I'm with Stupid." Is that my kid's pediatrician in a dirty baseball cap, buying a big box of frosted donuts?

There's a big green machine near the customer service desk that says COIN STAR! You tip a jar of coins into it and it gives you dollar bills in return. It takes seven and a half cents out of every dollar. Well, seven and a half cents doesn't buy a hell of a lot. My son checks the machine for coins that people have abandoned. He finds dirty pennies, bent dimes,

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Asian coins with square holes in the middle, Chuck-E-Cheese tokens. One day he finds three Susan B. Anthony dollars. He opens his hand to show them to me, like a sourdough showing off nuggets he's panned from a stream.

I roll my cart around trying to match my coupons to the prescribed size and variety of the products indicated. The music has been turned up very loud. It's Elvis. "In the Ghetto," he intones. "Ooooh, in the Ghe-e-e-t-toooo."

There are little paper signs taped to the registers where they think customers can't see them. ENSURE EYE CONTACT, they say. THE CUSTOMER IS OUR GUEST. All that eye contact, then, has only been in the name of fulfilling a corporate mission statement. I am chagrined. I look at the checker but deliberately avoid meeting his eyes. He is wearing a small green button on his apron. It reads, "I Forget What Service I'm Supposed to Provide." I feel a little better about things.

Supermarkets are hypermodern now, with their beeping laser scanners and their instant check-verifying computers. But the products can still set off waves of nostalgia. Right next to the Bars and Tarts aisle is the aisle of Marshmallows. They sit there, rank after rank of marshmallows, slouched in their plastic bags, featureless, complacent. I cannot turn into this aisle without being seized by memories of my childhood. When I was young I thought of marshmallows as a basic staple. My mother and my grandmother both kept several kinds of marshmallows in supply. The standard inch-and-a-half puffy pillows, of course, but also miniatures and varicolored marshmallows, and, at Easter time, Peeps, the little marshmallow chicks sprayed with yellow sugar.

Marshmallows could be eaten on their own, but, like rice and potatoes, were better when incorporated into exciting recipes. So marshmallows turned up in jello molds, in salads, in coleslaw. No steaming ramekin of mashed sweet potatoes was complete without a few jaunty miniature marshmallows atop. They appeared as stuffing and filling and topping. And we always had a jar of Marshmallow Fluff in the cupboard, ready to contribute the essence of marshmallows to any dish to which it was awkward to add them raw.

The pinnacle of marshmallow culture was toasting. Every time we were at my grandmother's and her wood fire was lit, the whole family suffered from a compulsion to toast marshmallows. We would run for sticks and spear the candies on them. The idea was to hold the marshmallow in the fire till just before ignition, then pull it away and blow on it frantically. Then you ate it, always burning your lips. They tasted terrible. The bad taste, my mother told me, was because you couldn't get real marshmal-

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lows anymore. I was living in the age of artificial marshmallows. My mother recalled the real thing, flat and pasty candies that came in cardboard boxes and went stale. They were the best for toasting. They went golden all over without scorching and had an indescribably beautiful texture. Listening to her marshmallow stories, I was initiated into the oral culture of my clan, there by the ancient hearth of my forefathers, learning that I had been born too late to live among heroic things.

The common wisdom is that supermarkets are a good place to meet women. Not quite as good as bookstores, but better than graveyards. I wonder about the accuracy of this belief. No one has ever made a seductive signal in my direction at a supermarket. It could just be that I am unattractive. It could be that I wear a wedding ring and have an eight-year-old swinging off the back of my shopping cart. Or it could be that I am wearing a ListServ Tenth Anniversary! T-shirt and singing "Lili Marlene" softly to myself in German. Any of these could account for the lack of propositions, but I should also consider the possibility that supermarkets just aren't that great for meeting lovelorn women.

The music stops. A prerecorded announcement comes over the sound system. "In-Store Radio," the announcer says cheerfully. "The best mix of information, shopping tips, and family music favorites. When you shop, be sure to listen to WISR, 'In-Store Radio.'" As if I had much of a choice. The voice stops. A new song begins. "If you wanna get down, down on the ground, COCAINE."

I believe in exact change. When the last item has passed the scanner and the sacks are ready to go into the cart, I gravely count bills into the checker's hand and then take out my change purse. Most men don't have a change purse. Mine starts a lot of conversations. It is a flat circle of leather. When you squeeze its edges, a puckered spiral of leather opens in the middle, revealing the coins. My grandfather carried one of these purses, with a Peace dollar tucked away in the bottom. He always carried a dollar on his person, he explained, so he could never be arrested for vagrancy. I still wonder why he felt he was at risk for being arrested for vagrancy.

"I like that purse!" the checker will say. Only young men comment on the purse. Women ignore it. "That's a neat purse." I grunt assent. "I wish I had a purse like that," he adds. I mark time. "What a good way to carry your change." I nod and smile again. I feel like saying, "Go ahead, what are you waiting for? I'm no homophobe. Tell me you have a break in ten minutes. Ask me out for coffee. It's a free country. I'm not going to lose it here at the checkout counter." But it never comes to that. He waits patiently while I count the exact change into his hand. He smiles shyly as

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I gather up the plastic grocery bags, looping them onto my fingers so I can carry three or four in each hand.

Sometimes I can't get the change counted out quickly. The checker and the people behind me become restive. I bristle with self-justification. I have it all planned out, what to say if anyone makes a dry remark about how long it's taking me to dig my change out of my purse. Do they know how much time I'm saving them? Do they know how long it would take the checker to scoop the change out of the drawer if I just paid with bills? Do they realize how much longer I'd be here if, like most customers, I started to write a check and then forgot to put my home and work numbers on it or forgot to have my driver's license handy? Are they aware of how considerate I'm really being, fumbling for this exact change, sparing the checker that awful moment when he has to change some twenties for rolls of quarters? Do they have the slightest idea what I'm doing for them, what I'm sacrificing for all of us, here in this line?

There may be something slightly wrong with me.

I meet my Dean of Liberal Arts and her husband in Dog Food. I am hoisting a twenty-pound bag of chow into my cart when I see them about to do the same thing. "You must have a dog," I remark insightfully. I do not think that I am going to make full professor any time soon.

I am very faithful to my supermarket. I used to go to a different supermarket a mile away from my home in a different direction. I liked it because it had decent produce and because they didn't put on airs. They let people shop in bare feet and even with bare chests. One day I got in line behind a guy with no shoes, no shirt, and in fact not much in the way of pants, just little bathing shorts underneath his belly. He was buying croissants and fresh chestnuts. They served him without comment. I liked that.

The new supermarket has won me over, mainly with free samples. I no longer eat lunch. I just sample things after work. In the past year I have eaten, one scoop at a time, about four pounds of Kajun Krab dip on captain's wafers. They keep out a big slow cooker full of lingüiça or fresh bratwurst. This food gives me something to look forward to after a long day of grading papers.

My only defections come when I go to Asian supermarkets. Twenty years ago, Asian markets in America were small, crowded operations in strip malls or urban Chinatowns. Now they have moved into abandoned supermarkets and K-Marts. They have re-created themselves on a grand scale. You push your cart through the aisles of our Asian supermarkets and experience a semiotic shift. The grammar is still the same: big aisles, big freezers, serried ranks of canned goods. But all the contents are different. There are big pyramids of cans of Grass Jelly Delight. The fish

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counters have whole squid and live snails. The butcher has feet, stomachs, and brains of assorted animals. On one memorable occasion they had an in-store special on pork uteruses.

I love the Asian supermarkets for their replication of American customs. Here is assimilation through food shopping. As I roll along looking for the dried vegetable of my dreams, I look up absently at the big signs above the aisles. They're right where they should be, proudly listing the contents of aisles six, seven, and eight. But they're all in Chinese.

I am lost in a supermarket, a prisoner of my own language.

It's Halloween. All the checkers and managers are in costume. The service manager is in Winnie-the-Pooh pajamas with big slippers. She looks adorable. I am trying to find Zip-Loc bags. At the service desk stands a wraith with a hood over his head, no face inside. "Where are the Zip-Loc bags?" I ask. He raises one arm, like the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come gesturing toward Scrooge's grave. It points toward aisle sixteen. I get the bags and check out. "Paper or plastic?" asks a shiny gold bumblebee with tinfoil wings. I wouldn't be anywhere else in the world.

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Lord Acton and the Lost Cause

CHRISTOPHER CLAUSEN

Photographs of John Emerich Edward Dalberg Acton, first Baron Acton, show a severe, imposing man dressed in black, with a beard that was extravagant even for a Victorian sage: an incurably dusty figure who would speak to us today, if at all, in a forgotten tongue. In appearance and sometimes in style, he resembles nothing so much as the stereotype of the comically shocked father of the bride in a Hollywood bust-and-bustle drama. Although historians of Victorian England know him as a leading theorist of liberty and liberalism, Lord Acton is at best dimly remembered by most readers for the aphorism that power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Unlike his older contemporary John Stuart Mill, he made no name for himself as a crusader for women's rights, for the abolition of the death penalty, or for other social causes that were to come into their own in the twentieth century. The major conflict of his career was with the Vatican over papal infallibility and religious freedom, for Acton was a dissident but devout Roman Catholic. Otherwise, his life—the life of a comfortable member of the gentry, briefly a Liberal member of Parliament, who was later raised to the lowest rung of the peerage—mostly lacked external drama. A historian of great erudition who was eventually appointed Regius Professor at Cambridge, Acton failed to write any of the books for which he took extensive notes. He published essays and reviews prolifically, but at his death in 1902 he left no sizable monument as a politician, ideologist, or historian.

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Worse still for his reputation today, this political moralist, who described himself early in life as "a partisan of sinking ships," passionately supported the South during the American Civil War. Although he was a lifelong opponent of slavery, he published a succession of influential articles embracing the Southern struggle for independence, and his partiality did not alter when the North won. "I deemed," he wrote to the defeated General Robert E. Lee in 1866, "that you were fighting the battles of our liberty, our progress, and our civilization; and I mourn for the stake which was lost at Richmond more deeply than I rejoice over that which was saved at Waterloo." For the rest of his career, Acton wrote favorably and at length about the Southern cause. Looking backward in 1881, he recalled that "I broke my heart over the surrender of Lee." He was still avowing what he called "Rebel sympathies" thirty years after Appomattox. His reasons for those sympathies shed light on the Civil War from an unfamiliar and surprising angle. Conversely, the distant flames of Richmond and Atlanta illuminate some of twentieth-century Europe's deepest shadows.

Judged on the basis of its treatment in the news media, in most recent books about the Civil War, and in such films as *Glory* and *Amistad*, support for the Confederate cause is less respectable today, at least among the cultural elite, than at any time since the turn of the last century. "We are careful that the lion should tell his story," Acton wrote in his notes, and the Northern story has been told more fully and frequently of late than ever before. The pro-Southern romanticism whose most potent symbol was *Gone with the Wind* finally ran aground, for perfectly obvious reasons, on the civil rights movement. To uphold the Lost Cause was no longer merely to sympathize with a gallant, picturesque underdog, but tacitly to support slavery and its persistent evil effects. For decades segregationists made twin fetishes of the Confederate battle flag and the venerable political doctrine of states' rights on which the Confederacy was based, ultimately discrediting both among people who believed in racial equality and the righting of ancient wrongs.

"As time goes on, fig-leaves wear off," Acton wrote in another context. Except on the farthest fringes of the right, nobody now uses the phrase "states' rights" as if it represented a constitutional theory unblemished by history. As for the Southern Cross, although it appears in one form or another on the flags of four Southern states, its advocates find themselves more on the defensive with each passing year, while the official celebrations of Confederate Memorial Day and other explicitly Southern holidays grow ever more perfunctory and embarrassed. Southern schoolchildren no longer memorize the masses of commemorative poetry—"The Conquered Banner," "Little Giffen of Tennessee," "Ode at Magnolia Cemetery"—that my Kentucky mother-in-law and many of her shrinking generation can still recite. Even the singing of "Dixie" has become a

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controversial act. A portrait of Lee himself was recently removed from a temporary exhibition of famous residents in Richmond, the Confederate capital, after threats of a black boycott.

With his gift for memorable phrases, Lord Acton expressed the central conviction of nineteenth-century liberalism more pithily than Mill or any other thinker: "Liberty is not a means to a higher political end. It is itself the highest political end." He denounced slavery with increasing intensity wherever he encountered it, whether in his study of the ancient world or in those backwaters of the nineteenth century where it still survived. (Its vestiges throughout the British Empire had been abolished in 1833, the year before his birth.) Nonetheless, in her excellent biography of Acton, Gertrude Himmelfarb complains that he evaded the moral issue of Southern slavery. George Watson, the editor of Acton's notes for his unwritten history of liberty, considers his support for the South "astounding" and adds disapprovingly that "Acton's mind was wayward in its genius, beyond all doubt, and ultimately conscious of the fact."

This observation, though in some respects well taken, merely emphasizes the anomaly; we still have to explain it as best we can. Did Acton the liberal accept at face value the South's claim to be a traditional agrarian society defending itself against the worldwide onslaught of brutal capitalism? Did he, like many romantic conservatives drunk on Sir Walter Scott, delight in seeing American democracy fall apart at the hands of dashing, chivalric Southern gentlemen? Or did he have better reasons?

Reviewing a German history of the Civil War four years after it ended, Acton remarked on "that strange combination of opposite motives which made extreme Tories and the most consistent Liberals unite in the same opinion." A sufficiently ignorant Tory in 1861 might rejoice that secession had apparently reversed the democratic threat to aristocratic privileges, gullibly accepting at face value the fantasies whereby Carolinians and Mississippians christened their wilderness plantations Waverly or Windsor and invented for themselves bluer blood than Queen Victoria's. Acton certainly admired the blue-blooded Lee, whom he hailed as a fellow opponent of slavery. But he took pleasure in pointing out to Lee that much English support for the Southern cause "was neither unselfish nor sincere. It sprang partly from an exultant belief in the imminent decline and ruin of Democratic institutions, partly from the hope that America would be weakened by the separation, and from terror at the remote prospect of Farragut appearing in the channel and Sherman landing in Ireland."

Acton himself, who sat in Parliament for an Irish borough, admired the American system of government. He had even visited the northeastern United States in 1853 on a sort of reverse Grand Tour, and despite an intellectual crudity that struck him particularly at Harvard, he came to

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share Tocqueville's general conclusions of twenty years earlier. Notwithstanding its imperfections, of which a conformist tendency toward the tyranny of the majority was the most threatening, he considered democracy both a hopeful and an irresistible development for Europe. As a historian, he wrote a good deal about the American Revolution, the political institutions it established, and the fate of those institutions during the Civil War. Much of what he published is dated and legalistic, but in the notes made long after the war for the never-written history of liberty, he often achieved a laconic lyricism.

> Europe incapable, America virgin soil, escaping from traditions, authority. There the Quakers and Independents, between Episcopalians and Presbyterians, were able to work out their ideas. Idealism, escape from custom, from the influence of surroundings, from the clutch of the dead. Their inward light resisted external influences.

There are even moments when Acton sounds like William Faulkner in "The Bear":

> Upon the ruins which, from the soil of Europe, among the tombs and the ruins, none could start fair. The past was too strong. They dragged a lengthening chain, worshipping ancestors—the weary nations of the old world. The new plant was reared on virgin soil. And this was the effect of American independence—to offer an example of a new society casting off authority, repudiating the past, built up on ideas. It worked by being unlike, separate and new.

Separate and new in what ways? That is, what did Acton particularly admire about the American experiment, either for its own sake or as an "example" for Europe? Its earliest advantages preceded independence, for Anglo-America began as a scattering of colonies; and colonies, the subject of a lengthy letter to the press in 1862, "are naturally liberal." Their liberalism arises from two causes. First, "No awe surrounds institutions of which all the colonists have seen the beginning, and which many helped to make." Laws that lack antiquity tend to be more rational and practical than those that have ancient superstition on their side. Second and more striking, colonies encourage "the mixture of races," another factor that breaks down old orthodoxies and leads to new nations. At this stage of his career an ambivalent Acton was quite capable, like most mid-Victorians, of referring to non-white inhabitants of European empires as "barbarous races." Nevertheless, he argued strongly for the equal rights of all races and saw their merging through intermarriage as a prerequisite to the ability of former colonies to "put forth all the natural forms of national and political life." Although still in its initial stages, that merging, Acton thought, was an essential element in the process by which formerly

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colonial societies became—would increasingly become—"separate and new." Imperialism, though an evil in itself, could sometimes lead through the crooked tunnels of history to beneficial results.

The American Revolution, naturally, had been led by revolutionaries. A decade later the Constitutional Convention was dominated by conservatives. Institutionally speaking, Acton the historian found the United States Constitution less perfect than its worshipers then or now would admit:

> The rules for the election of the president and for that of the vice-president proved a failure. Slavery was deplored, was denounced, and was retained. The absence of a definition of State Rights led to the most sanguinary civil war of modern times. Weighed in the scales of Liberalism the instrument, as it stood, was a monstrous fraud.

Yet the American constitutional system had one enormous virtue that made up for all its deficiencies: federalism. "By the development of the principle of Federalism," Acton went on in the same Cambridge lecture, "it has produced a community more powerful, more prosperous, more intelligent, and more free than any other which the world has seen." Even after Northern victory permanently weakened it, federalism was still the salient feature of the American system. In another lecture he again pays tribute to "the federal system, which limits the central government by the powers reserved, and the state governments by the powers they have ceded. It is the one immortal tribute of America to political science, for state rights are at the same time the consummation and the guard of democracy."

Why was the federal system so important to Acton? Identifying it with discredited racial policies, we forget how it might look to a European who had studied, among other events, the French Revolution. That revolution, in contrast to the American, institutionalized "the crushing preponderance of Paris and the Parisian populace" and quickly led to the insatiable imperialism of Napoleon, who was not finally defeated until Waterloo. The notorious instability of French politics, the fact that since 1793 two unsuccessful republics had been interspersed with four separate monarchies, in Acton's opinion owed a great deal to overcentralization. (Since his death, he would happily point out if he could, France has undergone three more republics interrupted by the Vichy dictatorship.) Britain, though freer and more stable than France, was likewise overcentralized—all power emanating from London. Home rule for Catholic Ireland, another cause near to Acton's heart, was perennially discussed and perennially deferred.

Once countries achieved democracy, whether it happened gradually or through revolution, the dangers of centralization were all the greater.

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In monarchies and oligarchies, a minority or an individual could often find support in tradition or public opinion, and sometimes in law, for resisting the most arbitrary expressions of political power, which after all did not represent the popular will. In democracies, where government can claim majority support, resistance is far more difficult. Who can stand up against the voice of the people? "The true democratic principle," Acton wrote, "that none shall have power over the people, is taken to mean that none shall be able to restrain or to elude its power. . . . The true democratic principle, that every man's free will shall be as unfettered as possible, is taken to mean that the free will of the collective people shall be fettered in nothing." Absolute power corrupts democracy just as surely as any other form of government.

Acton was under no illusion that civil or religious liberty was the chief desire of most people, especially those who were not well off. The aristocratic liberalism of early-nineteenth-century Europe, like the laissez-faire economics that accompanied it, had done little for the poor, for laboring people, for education or public health. Oppression by a class was no better than oppression by a race. Democracy's ability and inclination to deal with such problems was "its purpose and its strength," he wrote in 1878, but at the same time its "notorious danger." Through the systematic dispensing of benefits to particular groups or industries, a well-financed democratic government could buy support and extend its reach indefinitely.

Hence the overriding necessity in a democracy for institutional limitations on government authority. Proportional representation in Parliament would help somewhat by enabling geographically dispersed minorities to elect members, Acton thought, but a federal system of separated powers was the most effective solution yet proposed to the problem of democratic despotism. In the American system, states and localities had certain powers; the federal government had other, more or less clearly defined powers, which in turn were parceled out among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. America during its first decades under the Constitution was not yet democratic in the modern sense; Acton agreed with later historians who traced that development from the Jackson administration. But the federal system of divided sovereignty offered effective checks against an ambitious, threatening national government that might arise once the representatives of the people discovered unlimited power in their hands.

> No party had inscribed pure liberty on its flag, not even the Americans. Toleration, trade, slavery. But they made immense strides in the process of revolution. Resistance to prospective evil—speculative revolution. Division of powers in the Supreme Court. Federalism. No primogeniture, no established Church; no crown, church, aristocratic army.

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European countries were in transition, Acton feared, from archaic absolute monarchies to much more powerful, efficiently organized modern states that, accurately or not, claimed to act in the name of the people. To some degree the Americans had inoculated themselves against the tyranny of the majority before it ever became a reality.

The danger of centralized, illiberal mass politics in Europe was greatly increased by the rise of nationalism. Here again we encounter Acton's almost American concern with race, although we should remember that nineteenth-century authors used the term more broadly than writers today. Nationalism was bad for two related reasons: because it subordinated the state to the will of one race, excluding all others; and because the deification of the nation was one more pretext for suppressing human rights. The nation should be not an idol demanding sacrifices, but a collective name for the diversity of individuals whose freedom and well-being constitute its goals. The pessimistic Acton was among the few thinkers of his time who warned against the poisonous nationalism that blighted twentieth-century Europe from beginning to end. In "Nationality," another essay of 1862, he roundly declared:

> Those [countries] in which no mixture of races has occurred are imperfect; and those in which its effects have disappeared are decrepit. A State which is incompetent to satisfy different races condemns itself; a State which labours to neutralise, to absorb, or to expel them, destroys its own vitality; a State which does not include them is destitute of the chief basis of self-government. The theory of nationality, therefore, is a retrograde step in history.

Acton made it clear early in the Civil War that his interest in American political events was based on "the constant analogy they present to the theories and the events which are at the same time disturbing Europe." While the war was going on, France was ruled by Napoleon III, whom some historians regard as the first modern dictator because he perverted the machinery of democracy so effectively. Italy was completing its messy process of national unification. The most powerful German state, Prussia, was a militaristic autocracy in the early stages, under Bismarck's leadership, of unifying Germany through a succession of wars. (Not surprisingly, Acton pointed out, Prussia supported the North in the Civil War.) Austria, the only large multi-ethnic state in Europe, was under increasing attack from German, Italian, Hungarian, and Slavic nationalists. Nationalism embodied in the centralized bureaucratic state, so efficient that it could control all the complexities of modern life, was the chief danger Acton saw in the European future.

Democracy, though good in itself, was little protection against these

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malign forces. Both nationalism and bureaucracy could flourish as well in a democratic state as in a monarchy. Maybe they would even flourish better, because nationalism, like democracy itself, was a popular, leveling force, while military and civil bureaucracy achieved its greatest power in a state where the principle of sovereign authority—in a democracy, nominally the people—had no countervailing force or limits. As early as 1860, before Max Weber was born, Acton wrote about the danger of "bureaucratic centralization [taking] the place of self-government, and the State instead of an organism [becoming] a machine." Dissident individuals or minorities—religious, political, or regional—were relics that such a machine would soon grind into atoms.

As a liberal Catholic in Victorian England, Acton knew all there was to know about holding minority opinions. As an Englishman who had been born in Naples to an aristocratic German mother and educated in Munich, he was politically and culturally far more cosmopolitan, more connected with the centers of Europe, than all but a few of his English contemporaries. These experiences help explain why he hailed so enthusiastically

> the American notion that the end of government is liberty, not happiness, or prosperity, or power, or the preservation of an historic inheritance, or the adaptation of national law to national character, or the progress of enlightenment and the promotion of virtue; that the private individual should not feel the pressure of public authority, and should direct his life by the influences that are within him, not around him.

The Northern cause, he thought, represented the same centralizing, nationalistic tendencies he so disapproved in Prussia, joined with a messianic style of democracy that derived from the French Revolution.

In order to overpower its political adversaries, he concluded in 1866, the North "used the doctrines of Democracy to destroy self-government," drastically strengthening the executive branch at the expense of the federalism and balance of powers that had been the glories of the American system. The South, in this somewhat idealized scheme, represented an English moderation, "a protest and reaction against revolutionary doctrines . . . a move in the opposite direction to that which prevails in Europe." The Confederate Constitution, which repaired some of the defects and ambiguities of the United States Constitution, further aroused Acton's admiration. As he wrote to Lee, "I saw in State Rights the only availing check upon the absolutism of the sovereign will, and secession filled me with hope, not as the destruction but as the redemption of Democracy."

If the doctrine of states' rights was at bottom no more than a fig leaf for slavery, then defending it on the ground that it enhanced liberty was

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misguided at best. Acton did not see it that way. Early in the war he had resisted the argument that immediate abolition was a moral necessity. By late 1863, after the Emancipation Proclamation finally made the abolition of slavery a Union war aim, his views had evolved to the point where he denounced the obstinacy of the South in clinging to an institution that discredited its cause morally and reduced the potential size of its armies. The elimination of slavery by white Southerners themselves, he asserted, would disarm abolitionist sentiment in the North and at the same time enable the Confederacy to recruit black soldiers. Acton declared hopefully that "we can hardly doubt that the Confederates will choose freedom at the price of emancipation."

Alternatively, at a stage in the war when the balance was shifting in favor of the North, emancipation by Southerners would make possible a compromise that might offer the best of both worlds—"a restored Union on their own political principles, by a victory of self-government over the absolutism of the majority, and of freedom over Slavery." Such a confederation, "without a popular despotism at Washington or slavery at Richmond, . . . would redeem the American Democracy from both its supreme defects, and constitute the freest and most powerful nation in the world." The year after the war ended, Acton lamented that "slavery was not the cause of secession, but the reason of its failure." Taking strategic advantage of whites' refusal to make blacks "partners with them in the perils of war and in the fruits of victory," the North had abolished it overnight, with little planning or protection for the slaves' well-being, because it considered them mainly "an instrument for [slaveholders'] destruction."

"History," Acton wrote in 1888, "does not work with bottled essences, but with active combinations." In a tidier world, the defense of slavery would never have become entangled with the protection of some valuable structures of liberty—national self-determination, local autonomy, limited government, resistance to bureaucracy. By the same token, there was no logical reason for opposition to slavery in the nineteenth century, or support for racial equality in the twentieth, to be inseparable from the self-righteous nationalism of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," an all-powerful central government, the progressive weakening of federalism, and the abridgment of civil liberties that earlier (white) Americans took for granted. Matters turned out that way because history has careless habits.

With his European liberal's sense of the dangers of a centralized state whose power, because it was the power of the people, was in principle and effect absolute, Acton was perfectly accurate within his own frame of reference when he wrote in 1866: "If, then, slavery is to be the criterion which shall determine the significance of the civil war, our verdict ought,

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I think, to be, that by one part of the nation it was wickedly defended, and by the other as wickedly removed." Obviously, for Acton himself the immediate fate of slavery in America was not the most important criterion. If it had been, he would have chosen the other side. Whether he was wrong, in the context of American history, to weigh the issues as he did is beside the point. We must always remember that what concerned him most was the war's significance for a continent where slavery had vanished long ago. At a time when aggressive nationalism, centralization, and bureaucracy defined the modern state, Acton was a visionary who looked forward to a federal Europe that lay far in the future.

When the Western Allies reconstructed their shattered enemy after two world wars, they created the Federal Republic of Germany, citing many of the same reasons that Acton gave for preferring a decentralized system. In recent decades, especially since the fall of the Soviet Union, the devolution of political power throughout Europe to smaller, more local units, either through federalism or by outright secession, has been effectively reversing three hundred years of centralization. Most of Ireland won its independence long ago. The United Kingdom itself radically decentralized in 1999, when Scotland and Wales acquired their own parliaments. Not all instances of devolution, of course, are benign or peaceful. The serial disintegration of Yugoslavia represents a horrific recurrence of nationalism and a regression from Acton's belief in multi-ethnic states. Among the tombs and the ruins, Europe's chains still sometimes rattle. At the same time, the European Union has been expanding and evolving rapidly toward a federal (though highly bureaucratic) superstate made up of former enemies. Once again history creates a disorderly and ambiguous spectacle.

Even so, some of Lord Acton's deepest convictions may finally be coming into their own. If a federal Europe freed from ethnic hatreds should take on mature life, it will be as much a monument to him as to any of its living creators. Far from being an unrecognizable creature of another age, he was in some admirable respects ahead of his time. His support for the Confederacy, anomalous as it may seem, was in fact consistent with the rest of his humane and liberal outlook. To Mary Gladstone, the daughter of the prime minister who was his political mentor, he wrote in 1881: "The law of liberty tends to abolish the reign of race over race, of faith over faith, of class over class."

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Alone with the Cat

LYNNE SHARON SCHWARTZ

The cat was of no interest to me: I am not now and never was a cat lover. When cat lovers' cats made their advances, I sat in frozen courtesy. But for reasons also of no interest, I had to spend four months with the cat, and I determined, on principle, to make something interesting out of our enforced sojourn. I studied the features of catness that cat lovers go on about with such ardor: the rippling undulations of flesh and fur, the ingenious forays into high and low places, the fabled inscrutabilities. I was impressed. The cat lovers were right about all that. On the other hand, the cat was not aloof, as cat lovers had led me to expect, but affectionate. Like an infant, he craved attention.

I studied catness in stages, and soon I felt I had thoroughly witnessed its famous mysteries. Which is not to say that I plumbed those mysteries or that they were not worth plumbing, only that I had had enough. They were familiar now, and they were finite.

I might have passed the remaining time indifferent to the cat, but there came upon me an unfamiliar sense of freedom and power in his presence. Alone with the cat in this singular situation—not quite solitary, not quite social—I was free to do anything at all. He would never tell. The cat would not reveal any bursts of temper, peculiar lapses, eccentric habits or rituals, vexing flaws. If by any chance he judged, he would keep those judgments to himself and soon forget, or so I assumed; he would not bring old grudges to the next encounter as a person might.

Alone, we know who we are. In company our certainty is blurred. Other presences penetrate and work subtle changes and adjustments on our innards, like surgical lasers. Also, in the company of others we hide

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our faults as best we can or, failing that, tinge them with a whimsical, quasi-charming light, often deluding ourselves in the process. There is no need to hide our failings with a cat: the cat will never tell. With the cat I was not accountable or, in any case, not accountable to anyone but myself. How I behaved with the cat would be a uniquely accurate reflection of character: rather than penetrating and altering me, the cat would serve as my mirror.

Being with a baby comes to mind. Babies cannot tell either. But with a baby we are constrained to behave decently since, after all, it is a baby and, more often than not, our own; moreover, if we behave badly with the baby, we may suffer the ill effects later on. We need not bear the ill effects of our behavior with a cat: if it becomes unmanageable or neurotic as a result of mistreatment, we can give it away, which is not ordinarily the case with a baby. So with a cat we see ourselves not through a gloss of social behavior but face to face, mirrored: who we really are in relation to the Other, who we might be in a situation of impossible freedom.

Under the unexpected aspect of mirror, the cat became infinitely fascinating, and my stay with him became an exercise in self-scrutiny—part of my routine, in any event, and now accomplished while I cared for the cat. Killing two birds with one stone, as they say, only nothing like killing was involved. I was kind to the cat, for the most part; I had little urge to be cruel, even when he was intrusive or irritating. That was a happy discovery. I was willing to stroke and give the affection he craved, even willing to play a bit. But only when I was in the mood. I was utterly free, with the cat, to indulge my moods, which were many and various, a freedom I had not felt with babies. You cannot ignore babies when you are not in the mood, or rather, you can but you will suffer guilt or worse. You can ignore cats without suffering guilt, at least I could. Did I hold myself to a higher standard of behavior with babies because babies are the same species and thus compel allegiance? Or was it simply greater love for the babies? I do not think greater love, though it surely existed, is the answer. Great love has never held anyone to a high standard of behavior, quite the contrary. At any rate, I was kind to the cat when I felt like it and ignored him when I felt no kindness, and these alternations were arbitrary.

When the cat seemed puzzled or dismayed at my arbitrariness, I didn't care, as I would have with a baby; I would have cared what a baby thought of me, aside from caring for the baby itself. Faced with a baby's dismay, I would have mustered a show of congeniality. With the cat I rarely made such efforts.

At first I was playful with the cat, and he loved to play. After a while I noticed that although I didn't mind having him curl up warm against my body, I no longer was inclined to play. I ought to play, I

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thought: the cat needed, or was entitled to, or at least would have enjoyed, play. But for various reasons I no longer felt playful; and after some moral struggle, I decided I need not force myself to play with the cat as I surely would have done with a baby, who needs play for its civilized future.

So this cat would have to do without much play. He would be an infrequently played-with cat, and if his mood became somber in consequence, like mine, so be it. Failure to play was not mistreatment. Anyway, the cat would never tell.

If I was not obliged to play with him, I was even less obliged to sleep with him. Yet when he took to sleeping in my bed at night, I liked feeling his ripply warmth nearby. I could even imagine myself a greathearted cat lover, which I knew I was not. When he walked up my back and pawed at my face, though, I had no qualms about pushing him away. Qualms arose when he settled in the precise place at the end of the bed where I wanted to move my feet. The cat could not be faulted, yet my feet longed for that very spot. Why not just shove him over? The cat was sleeping. I have a keen reverence for sleepers; they seem so trusting and vulnerable, so touchingly benign in a near-sacred way. Still, it seemed overly scrupulous to sacrifice the comfort of my feet merely to avoid disturbing a cat, especially when in all likelihood he would promptly fall back asleep. On the other hand, who was I in the hierarchy of creatures, and of what importance were my feet, that this minuscule comfort should take precedence over the cat's sacred sleep? Wakeful and distracted, I pondered whether the need to move my feet might be born of a perverse, unconscious urge to cross the cat. No, I thought not. At last, overcome by the absurdity of self-denial, I would nudge him over. He looked innocently aggrieved and sometimes went away altogether. I wished I could explain and persuade him to return, only not to that precise spot. His catty inability to grasp this explanation was frustrating, and it came between us.

Cat lovers say cats are a comfort, but I rarely found this to be so. Though his warmth at my side was pleasant, like a living pillow, the cat did not relieve loneliness or grief or frustration. Nor was he company: his cat silence, his very inability to tell, which conferred such freedom, was a drawback when it came to being company. The cat was more a burden than a comfort. As cat lovers are always saying, cats require little in the way of physical care, far less than infants. The burden was not physical care. The burden of the cat was his presence. He was there, inexorably, and as such demanded a response, whether attention or indifference. Even ignoring a fellow creature requires effort, and for the conscientious and scrupulous, possibly more effort than attention. But I made this effort. Now and then I regretted my inattentiveness and tried to make amends, treating the cat as I treat people, following the moral imperative that the needs of others have some claim on us, as we strive to believe. But only now and then, in an arbitrary way.

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Physical care aside, the cat was a burden as infants are burdens and not company, except that with infants we bear the burden as an investment in expectation of future return: a baby will grow to be company, a comfort, while a cat, though it ages and endures, never outgrows catness. Besides, we are responsible for raising the babies, not only for their future good but for our own, since if we do not raise them properly, they will continue to be a burden. And also people will readily see we have not raised our babies properly. Would people censure a cat's behavior and judge us to be poor cat raisers? I think not. The cat would be thought to have a bad nature: we would claim we had made every effort to raise him properly, but his bad nature defeated our efforts. This excuse, rightly or wrongly, would not work with a child. Nurture is more in vogue than nature.

Once, as I tried to nudge the cat off my desk—for he had the habit of leaping up to sit on my spread-out papers, a habit that was cute once or twice but soon palled—he slipped and landed not on his feet, as I had heard cats always do, but on his back. He looked stunned and distressed. I was distressed too, not only because I had had no intention of hurting him, but also because if he were maimed for life, I might be suspected of cruelty or violence. True, the cat could not tell—even if he could, my nudge had been gentle, not violent—but the vet might harbor suspicion. Mistakenly. Luckily, after a tense moment the cat rose and sauntered away.

On a few occasions I spoke harshly to the cat, but speaking harshly did not give the relief—often a false relief—that speaking harshly to a person might have given. In a moment of pique, I even smacked him lightly. And once, when the cat persisted in climbing on the kitchen counter, pawing and sniffing at food, knocking over containers, I screamed loudly, "Get away. Get away!"—louder than I had screamed at anyone or anything in years. My scream must have expressed a resentment stored up during all the time I was learning the fabled mysteries of catness, a dormant resentment ready to spring awake and pounce. And then I shut up. Maybe I had gained a measure of self-control since my screaming days, or maybe I grasped, even in my rage, that screaming would do no good: the cat could not understand a surge of bilious words as children would have done. Though now that I think of it, maybe they hadn't understood either, back then. Anyhow, no satisfaction could be gotten from scolding the cat, not that there is ever much satisfaction in scolding anyone; but somehow the opaque catness of the cat, the way he slunk away as if ashamed not of himself but of me, made that very clear.

I grasped that the presence of any living creature, except maybe a plant, would be a burden to me. The least burdened state would be solitude, where I could indulge every arbitrary mood without the slightest thought of its effect on others. But solitude too has its burdens and demands. There is really no easy way to be conscious; that must be why I revere sleep.

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I was cool toward the cat after the kitchen counter incident. Not cruel, only cool, again indulging my nature with all its moods. The cat would never tell. The cat might even be seen as practice for indulging my moods in society, for not straining to offer more in the way of kindness or engagement than I am inclined to give. Cat therapy. I was almost afraid to envision how I might behave with people, were I to master too well the lessons of being with the cat. I would rarely consider how others feel or what they need, until I was abandoned by everyone, left all alone to indulge my arbitrary moods.

After a day or so, I decided this coolness was unworthy of me. The cat was just a cat; he could not help climbing on the counter. (Or could he? Was he purposely provoking me? This is one of the unplumbed mysteries of catness.) He had no moral nature and apparently did not learn from experience; his feelings could be hurt, yes, but he was unwilling or unable to behave well in order to avoid having his feelings hurt. I had no illusion that cause and effect was operative, that shouting would deter him from pawing at food; I did not credit the cat with that much logic or self-control. Even babies do not have that much logic or self-control, though we tend to forget that when rearing them. Anyhow, the cat need not be prepared to get on in life. There were no crucial or obligatory lessons. Treating him well was in no way an investment in the future.

Treating the cat well was a gratuitous act. Living with the cat was living in an eternal present—no history, no patient shaping of connection through accommodation, no call for anger and forgiveness. The cat was a cat. I might as well end my coolness and give him the affection he craved. But I felt constrained giving affection I didn't feel, reasoned affection, so I waited a day or so until my annoyance dissipated and I could give affection in good faith, and then we resumed our life in the eternal present.

In the end, I liked the cat best when he sat quietly on my lap and consented to be stroked. But while seemingly contented, he would abruptly leap up to pursue his mysterious business, as arbitrary in his way as I was in mine. Maybe he didn't like me at all, only used me as a provider of food and strokes. (Or as a mirror?) He must like me a bit, I thought. Probably he both liked me and used me, in very human fashion. We may love others, but they are useful all the same as providers, and it is wisest for both user and used not to measure comparative degrees of love and utility.

I remembered I loved my infants with most ease when they too lay docile on my lap, showing no will and making no abrupt movements. They were safe. Passive receptacles for my affection. I was safe. As soon as they stirred, perhaps to demand of me something unknown, I would feel a faint irritation, which only years later I recognized as the mask of panic.

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As soon as a creature shows itself distinct and self-willed, it begins to determine and shape the nature of the love it seeks. And in turn, the love you give becomes something not entirely of your own shaping and thus dangerous. Was I unable, then, to love anything that had its own being; could I love only an utterly passive creature? If so, my love was arbitrary and self-serving, not so much love of something distinct from me as love of my own act of loving, which is easy, natural, and demands nothing. Self-love.

The cat was becoming a fun-house mirror, alarming me with his unlovely distortions. I turned away. His usefulness was finished. Even so, when our sojourn was over, I missed the cat from the heart. I study photographs of him. In the photographs, there are no reflections of me. I see only the cat himself—large, orange, and beautiful. At last, with him far away and requiring nothing, I can revel in his beauty.

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Morality Plays

ANDREW STARK

"Leave those vain moralists, my friend," Rousseau advised, "and return to the depth of your soul." His great contemporary Edmund Burke lamented that "the age of chivalry is gone; that of . . . economists . . . has succeeded." One can only imagine, then, what the two thinkers might have said about our age—the age when moralists and economists got together to produce moral economy. From the Republican House Majority Leader Dick Armey, who argues that "poverty is not a material but a moral phenomenon," to the liberal journalist E. J. Dionne, Jr., who claims that "many aspects of the economy that conservatives celebrate . . . undermine the very virtues that conservatives . . . revere," the political air is thick with postulated links and counterlinks between moral and economic growth or decay.

Moral economy has commanded intellectual interest in earlier periods, but in no American era until now has it managed to break through, to cross over into mainstream political debate, shaping arguments on both sides with such controlling force. This indeed is moral economy's moment. But it may be only a moment. For when moral-economic arguments are pressed into the service of our dominant ideologies, liberalism and conservatism, they display a pronounced tendency to turn in on themselves and self-destruct. At the very moment when moral-economic arguments seem to define contemporary liberalism and conservatism, they have also developed the capacity to break liberalism and conservatism apart.

In times past, both liberal and conservative moral economy were relatively straightforward. Liberals argued that wealthy societies are not nec-

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essarily moral ones—that the creative destruction of capitalism lays waste the moral fabric of communities through plant closings or forced migrations—and that government is needed to compel the malefactors of wealth to meet their moral obligations. Moving from the social to the personal level, liberals also argued that morally virtuous individuals, even though they work hard and play by the rules, will not necessarily become economically well off, without redistributive assistance from the state. The notion that personal economic failure is not automatically attributable to personal moral failings, that unemployment and bankruptcy are not necessarily one's fault, is often cited as *the* psychological breakthrough of New Deal liberalism.

Conservatives, at the social and individual levels, have always claimed the opposite. Seeking to minimize the need for redistributive government, they argue that wealthy societies, left to their own devices, will adequately take on the moral burden of caring for those less well off, through private charity, philanthropy, and voluntarism. And conservatives have for generations insisted that morally virtuous individuals—honest, reliable, cooperative—will, left to their own devices, eventually make their own way up the economic ladder without help from the government.

Liberals and conservatives, of course, still make these arguments. At the social level, liberal political economists such as Lester Thurow worry that wealthy societies, in the absence of government intervention, will inevitably show insufficient concern for the disadvantaged whom they leave in their wake. At the individual level, liberal intellectuals such as Robert Reich heap skepticism on the "story of the little guy who works hard, takes risks, believes in himself and eventually earns wealth and fame." On the other side, conservative scholars such as Marvin Olasky counter that society, once freed of government's heavy hand, will indeed unleash both the wealth and the previously repressed altruistic spirit necessary to ameliorate a host of social ills. And at the individual level, Irving Kristol and other conservative intellectuals speak of an enduring connection between such "bourgeois virtues as honesty, sobriety [and] a concern for family and community," on the one hand, and personal "worldly success" on the other.

In the past decade, however, two political issues—one at the individual level, the other at the social level—have emerged to leave both liberal and conservative moral economy in tatters. The first is the debate over welfare, which operates at the individual level. Here conservatives, who have long believed that an individual's moral character has a positive influence on his capacity to accumulate wealth, began arguing that an individual's wealth has a negative influence on his moral character. Whether we are talking about the small increments of wealth that the welfare state provides the poor, or the large amounts of wealth that rich

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parents provide their children, economic largesse affords individuals the wherewithal to indulge in moral depravity: to buy drugs, leave their spouses, give birth out of wedlock, lead a life of indolence. "In very different ways," the neoconservative intellectual Norman Podhoretz has written, "groups at both ends of the . . . economic scale . . . have been liberated from . . . traditional [moral] norms." Or as the conservative writer David Frum puts it, "Big government does for the ninety-eight percent of society that is not rich what her millions did for the late Barbara Hutton—it enables them to engage in destructive behavior without immediately suffering the consequences." "Without welfare," Frum concludes, "people would cling harder to working-class respectability than they do now."

Liberals, put on the defensive, have taken to arguing that it is precisely when an individual becomes economically deprived that he or she becomes morally depraved. Unsatisfactory work prospects lead the poor to take it out on their families—to abuse them, abandon them, or else turn to crime for a living—in much the same way that unsatisfying family relationships lead the rich to plunge into their work. Only when individuals are enabled to earn what E. J. Dionne calls a decent living wage—through a combination of "social legislation, unionization, and welfare"—is moral behavior possible; no longer will they have to resort to larceny, drug use, or desertion. Whether the moral ill is family breakdown or teen pregnancy, the economist David M. Gordon has written, "we can find falling real wages or job insecurity lurking in the background." For decades liberals have argued that possessing an admirable moral character does not necessarily ensure that one will reap economic rewards. Now, in the wake of the welfare crisis, they must also argue that economic well-being is the single most important ingredient in the development of individual moral character.

Globalization is the other new issue stretching liberal and conservative moral economy into new shapes, this time at the social level. Liberals, who argue that economically prosperous societies do not typically win high marks for moral conduct, now claim in addition that it is the morally advanced society that stands the best chance of prospering economically in a competitive international system. Dionne writes that a moral society—one in which the social virtues of "loyalty, commitment, generosity, and community-mindedness" abound—is a prerequisite for economic success. The Republican Congress "may choke on the fact," as Century Foundation president Richard C. Leone has put it, "but capitalism works best when . . . the system is fair and democratic . . . when it is mixed with community and public values." Consumers will purchase from, employees will give their all to, and the physical environment will be there only for those companies that treat them well; the notion that a

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society can "do well by doing good" is very much a contemporary liberal refrain.

Yet conservatives such as David Brooks, an editor at the *Weekly Standard,* dispute this, arguing that moral decency—social habits of "trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, caring, and citizenship"—in fact hamstring the audacity, ambition, and high-spirited competitiveness necessary for a society's economic expansion. As the neoconservative historian Gertrude Himmelfarb wrote in describing this argument, "Civil society is seen to be problematic. . . . If it succeeds in promoting the civic or social virtues (the 'caring virtues,' as they are sometimes called)," it risks "undermin[ing] the free market," with its requisite social traits of entrepreneurship and ambition. Contemporary conservative critics of business ethics and corporate social responsibility, such as Milton Friedman, echo this refrain, arguing that societies whose businesses are overly concerned with doing good are less likely to do well, especially in a fiercely competitive global environment. For fifty years, conservatives have claimed that when societies are economically prosperous they will be more than sufficiently morally virtuous. Now they argue, in light of globalization, that when societies are shot through with moral virtue, they are likely to risk becoming less-than-optimal economic performers.

Are liberal and conservative moral economy internally contradictory, each one carrying the seeds of its own destruction? If they are, it is not because it is inconsistent to believe (as many conservatives do, for example) that personal moral virtue brings an individual economic success, but that personal economic well-being undermines an individual's moral virtue. Nor is it illogical to hold, as many liberals do, that a morally virtuous society is likely to become an economically successful one, but that, assuming it does reach economic supremacy, it will not necessarily acquit itself well morally. These propositions may simply describe with considerable accuracy the natural cycles—the organic rises and falls—in the lives of individuals and societies. They may bespeak Catch-22s in the human condition, not contradictions within liberalism and conservatism.

But now let me slightly reshuffle what I have said and suggest that liberals and conservatives do contradict themselves, because each ideology argues that what is good for societies is not necessarily good for individuals—and vice versa. Almost all of what we call American liberalism, for example, would seem to be traceable to one or another of the following views. First, growth in national income risks unraveling a society's moral fabric, but growth in personal income strengthens an individual's moral fiber. Second, if a society is morally decent it will prosper economically, but if an individual is morally decent there is no similar guarantee. American conservatism is the designation we give to the con-

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trary set of doctrines, that economically well-off societies have a greater tendency to behave morally than do economically well-off individuals, but that morally punctilious individuals have a greater tendency to do well economically than do morally fastidious societies.

Is it possible that societies and individuals are so different that what works for one fails for the other? At the core, this is what liberals and conservatives are now telling us.

Societies are fractured while individuals are unitary: if there's a difference between the two, this would seem to be it. Certainly this is why liberals think that a growing national income poses greater moral hazards for societies than a growing personal income does for individuals. Within society as a whole, liberals say, some groups that become wealthy will inevitably behave badly toward others that do not. When liberals speak of the morally corrosive effects of wealth accumulation at the social level, they have in mind corporations tearing apart or abandoning communities, or the rich seceding from and turning their backs on the poor. But why, liberals implicitly ask, should an *individual* whose income goes up—whether because of welfare or other state programs—abuse himself in any analogous way as a result? Even if all of society does not benefit from a given increase in national income, all of an individual does benefit from a rise in his or her personal income.

What if individuals and societies are in fact not so different? Indeed, the main lesson of the welfare debate seems to be that individuals are best understood as mini-societies. In 1992, in his book *The New Politics of Poverty*, Lawrence Mead wrote that for decades it was assumed that "if government and the economy took care of workers, . . . employees would be able to take care of their families. . . . Debates in progressive politics largely took the family for granted." Today, however, the debate over welfare does not stop at the threshold of the home—treating each as an individual (that is, indivisible) black box represented by a sole breadwinner—but rather opens it up, there to confront a small fractured society with multiple players. "What was once offstage," as Mead says, has "come onstage."

What has come to public attention, specifically, is that when the income of some family members goes up as a result of a welfare check, they may very well treat other family members badly—abandoning them, seceding from them, turning their backs on them. Certainly this has been the governing insight of contemporary conservatism. "Family affection," as David Frum puts it, is "one of the weakest of human ties." Welfare makes it possible for women to leave the fathers of their children, or, indeed, to leave those children themselves. Conservatives may or may not be right about this; the point is that, to the extent that a family is better understood as a fractious mini-society, then whatever wealth's consequences happen to be for society at large, they should be much the same

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for the individual family unit. So if liberals are going to argue that wealth tends to have a disintegrating "I'm all right, Jack" effect on the moral fabric of societies, it would be hard to reason why wealth should not have the same effect, at least to some degree, at the family level.

But conservatives are not out of the woods either. In effect, their moral economy has forced them to characterize "society at large" as a more fraternal, less fractured entity than the family. Consider Newt Gingrich's oft-expressed confidence that if only the welfare state's choke hold on the economy is allowed to relax, corporations and other groups will provide laptop computers for poor children, adopt all the homeless in America, and free up their employees to do three hours of volunteer work a week. "When the American people have more they give more," Steve Forbes has told his campaign audiences; "the American people are known as a generous people, a giving people." Conservatives, in other words, argue that at a social level we are moved by altruism, prepared to use our private largesse to help out strangers as the welfare state retrenches. Yet this jars, because at the same time conservatives have been arguing that at the family level we are actuated (in Charles Murray's terms) by a keen "self-interest," prepared to abandon family members at the drop of a hat when largesse from the welfare state or elsewhere makes that possible. If, as a society, we are indeed prepared to use our wealth in a way that respects our moral obligations to strangers, then why as individuals would we use our wealth in a way that flouts our obligations to family members? Could the relationship between members of society be as altruistic and community-minded as conservatives say, when the relationship between family members is so self-interested and atomistic? Could the social bonds of generosity really be so strong when the familial bonds of affection are so weak?

In the welfare debate, then, both liberals and conservatives assume—implausibly—that individual families and societies display very different moral economies. In the globalization debate, it turns out, they do the same. Consider Francis Fukuyama's 1995 book, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity.* Societies, Fukuyama argues, prosper economically to the extent that they are able to replicate, on a nationwide scale, the moral virtues of trust, affection, cooperation, and mutual responsibility that traditionally characterize the individual family. In some societies, like those of southern Italy and China, while there is still sufficient trust at the family level to create prosperous small domestic enterprises, there is insufficient trust between strangers at the social level to go the next step and create the huge private corporate enterprises that, in Germany and the United States, have brought fantastic economic growth.

Whatever its weaknesses, Fukuyama's argument at least has the virtue of consistency. It sees the same moral-economic dynamics operating at

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the individual-familial and social levels, which is why it points up the inconsistency that globalization has wrought in both liberal and conservative moral economy. If liberals believe that a morally virtuous society—one in which employers pay higher wages, tend to the environment, and are solicitous of consumers—will be rewarded in a wildly careering global economic system, then why should they be less sanguine that moral behavior by individuals—those who work hard and play by the rules—will be rewarded by their domestic economic systems? Conversely, if conservatives believe that individuals who display the moral virtues of solicitousness, scrupulousness, trustworthiness, and cooperativeness are not chumps but will in fact be rewarded economically within their own societies, then why shouldn't societies that display these same virtues attract business and prosper within the international system?

It goes against the grain of American political argument—maybe it is even heresy—to suggest that individuals and societies resemble one another. For many purposes, those having to do with constitutional freedoms, for example, we rightly insist on treating the individual (or his family) and society as profoundly different entities. But when it comes to the everyday politics of welfare and globalization at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the distinction carries less weight. The debate over welfare, in essence, requires that we not stop at the threshold of the individual household, but instead cross it and approach the family as if it were a small society. Globalization, by contrast, requires that we not stop at the frontiers of our own society but cross them, recognizing that each society is but one individual actor in a roiling international economy. Since liberalism and conservatism now define themselves as competing moral economies, each must ensure that the links between morals and economics it posits for societies resemble the links it posits for individuals. This they have not done.

Why? Because support for a strong regulatory and redistributive state *requires* liberals to distinguish between societies and individuals. If economic prosperity at the societal level fails to bring moral responsibility in its wake, then we need progressive labor, consumer, and environmental legislation. But only if economic prosperity at the individual level *does* bring moral responsibility can we justify generous welfare and redistributive policies. If moral decency at the societal level brings economic prosperity, then we need progressive labor, consumer, and environmental legislation. But only if moral decency at the individual level goes unrewarded economically can we justify generous welfare and redistributive schemes. Conservatives, who oppose the regulatory and redistributive state, are required to make just the opposite set of moral-economic arguments.

Already there are signs that both liberal and conservative moral economy are coming unraveled—that liberals and conservatives themselves recognize that they cannot say different things about individuals

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and societies. For example, Gertrude Himmelfarb has long argued (as have most conservatives) that at the individual level, wealth, whether from private sources or the government, does not necessarily bring personal moral elevation. But she also quite consistently goes the next step, chiding her fellow conservatives for failing to recognize that, at the social level as well, a booming "free-market economy does not automatically produce the moral goods that they value." Conversely, conservatives such as Jack Kemp—who do believe that a booming economy will inspire virtuous behavior (altruism, generosity) at the social level—also argue that targeted injections of economic assistance at the individual level will cultivate personal moral virtues such as familial responsibility, industriousness, and respect for property. This certainly makes for a moral economy consistent at the social and individual levels. But it has also led Kemp and his followers to propose an array of government programs, such as tenant ownership of public housing and enterprise zones, for which they are then duly chastised by other conservatives.

Similarly, the major fault lines within contemporary liberalism are traceable to a struggle on the part of both paleoliberal "old Democrats" and neoliberal New Democrats to reach some level of consistency in liberalism's moral economy. For example, the "paleoliberal" economist Jeff Faux argues, as most liberals do, that personal economic well-being is the surest curative for a host of moral ills (indolence, illegitimacy, desertion) at the individual level; hence Faux supports robust welfare programs. But Faux then goes further than many liberals in arguing that, at the broadest social level, roaring economic growth stands the best chance of expunging a host of moral ills (corporate abandonment of employees, white flight from urban centers, and public disaffection from politics). Adopting such a moral economy allows Faux and other paleoliberals to urge a stimulative macroeconomic policy of high government spending and low interest rates.

This certainly makes for a moral economy consistent at the social and individual levels, but it also creates deep tensions within political liberalism. Will Marshall, of the Progressive Policy Institute, and other neoliberals twit what they see as the simplemindedness of Faux's nostrum ("get the economy booming again and the rising tide will cover our blighted social landscape"), dismissing it on the ground that "such economic reductionism drains politics of moral sense." At the social level, in other words, neoliberals are hesitant to assume that economic well-being—whether fostered by government or the market— will cure all moral blights. But Marshall goes further, arguing that at the individual level as well, economic well-being in itself does little to bring about personal moral improvement. In fact, Marshall and other neoliberals, perhaps propelled by an instinctive urge toward moral-economic consistency, depart from traditional liberalism in entertaining the possibility that a wel-

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fare check might indeed be morally corrupting—an anti-government stance for which they are duly chastised by paleoliberals.

Perhaps the one contemporary political current that comes closest to arguing a consistent moral economy is communitarianism, which, according to its prominent theorist, Amitai Etzioni, rests on a "single core thesis": that by cultivating the resources of communities, we can satisfy conservative desires to "shore up our values, responsibilities [and] institutions" without arousing liberal concerns over "the moralism and authoritarianism that leads to a church-dominated state or a right-wing world." Communitarians, by and large, believe that economic well-being does not automatically translate into moral decency at either the social *or* the individual level. Like liberals, they worry that unbridled capitalism has a tendency to weaken the moral fabric of society; like conservatives, they fret that exploding welfare payments might weaken the moral fiber of individuals. So, for example, the communitarian thinker David Blankenhorn maintains that "more prosperity" will not in itself "generate a renewal of American civil society," while insisting that at the individual level, "welfare cannot turn children into good citizens."

Now reverse the economic-moral causal arrow, and consider that most communitarians believe that moral virtue *does* reliably translate into economic prosperity and that it does so at both individual *and* social levels. In the political theorist William Galston's view, for example, there continues to be "a nonrandom relation between the effort, contribution, and skill [individuals] display and the rewards they receive," while at the social level, "modern industry requires as much cooperation as competition." Since moral behavior leads to economic well-being at both levels, communitarians recommend traditional familial and educational values for individuals, while often counseling progressive consumer, labor, and environmental legislation for societies. Yet although communitarians may have evolved a fairly consistent moral economy, they *for that very reason* have no coherent position on whether government should grow or shrink. This is why there are—and always will be—what Philip Selznick, in *The Moral Commonwealth,* calls "communitarians of both left and right."

As for liberals and conservatives, no matter how well defined their respective views on government might remain, the moral-economic arguments underlying those views have begun, slowly but surely, to turn in on themselves. Moral-economic arguments are like misaligned tectonic plates, on which these two edifices of American politics currently rest. As those plates struggle into alignment, the result will be increasing fissures, schisms, and ruptures within liberalism and conservatism. Moral economy, all of a sudden so much with us, may find that its day in American politics is over before it has begun.

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The Billion Heartbeats of the Mammal

GARY FINCKE

"Feel this," my father says, guiding my hand
To the simple braille of his pacemaker.
"Sixty," he tells me, "over and over
Like a clock," and I mention the billion
heartbeats of the mammal, how the lifespan
Can be rough-guessed by the 800 beats
Per minute of the shrew, the 200
Of the house cat, speeding through their billion
In three years, in twelve. How slowly we act,
According to our pets. How we are stone
To the frantic insects. "The hurry-up
To nowhere," he says, working out the math,
Busy with wiping down linoleum
The way he swirled a mop through locker rooms
Before striding the push broom up and down
The grain of gym sweep, repeating the moves
Of twenty kinds of cleaning between ten
And six-thirty in the high school I used
Between eight and three-fifteen. He might have
Been following the Peterson Method
For care, learning the neat lines and ovals
Of my mother, who wrote to me, the day
She died, a perfectly scripted letter,
Pages of open vowels so nothing
She said could be misread. And even now,
In the attic, inside her black notebooks
Stacked and banded, her carefully copied
Familiar quotes, the good advice

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Of the writing exercise dating back
To a hundred lines of ovals, fifty
Of the properly slanted line. Penciled
Pages of strict, block printing, the two-space
Capitals, the touch of the tall letters
To the roof of lines, my father finding
By multiplication and division,
The thirty years of the human, how he is
Closing in on three billion while I am
Nearing two. How we are the exception
To the heartbeat system, taking so long
To come of age we have time to practice
The Peterson Method for memory,
Preserve these things to open up and read.

Gary Fincke is Director of the Writers' Institute at Susquehanna University. He is the author of *The Technology of Paradise*; his newest collection of poems, *The Almanac for Desire*, will be published this spring by BookMark Press.

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Egret

MOLLY McQUADE

The slick head has seamed the bay
and trusted in.
True rhythm is that water, sunken ripple
underseen.

Molly McQuade's collection of poetry, *Barbarism*, will be published this year. *Stealing Glimpses*, her book of essays about poetry, came out in 1999.

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On Not Seeing Venice

DUNCAN FALLOWELL

I have never been to Venice and have no wish to go. People say, you must go to Venice, you'll love it. But they said the same about another vision on water, New York, and I did go to New York and found nothing except giant sculpture. Conversely, those other visions on water, Istanbul and St. Petersburg, I do love—they are dynamic but human, not stifled in the prophylactic of affluence.

No doubt about it, rich cities are cold to the heart. Money enables the self to choose, and usually it chooses to remain aloof. Choosiness is anti-life. Tokyo and Hong Kong—I know people who have failed to have any non-commercial experiences whatsoever in these places. New York, ruled by money and fame, has succumbed to the glaciation of violence. Walk through New York: streets of desolation, towers of emptiness. Venice, once velvet and marble, is now tense with clingfilm—the most expensive, the most useless city in Italy. Simply to breathe its air is to drain one's credit card.

Venice circulates in the bloodstream of world culture. It is international, that is to say, nowhere. It is city as exhibit, city as performance art, city as inauthentic experience. Is the search for authentic experience doomed in the modern world? Of course not. Just beware of marketing, the media, and virtual reality. For people in the developed world, vegetables no longer come out of the ground, no longer come from the market, no longer come from the greengrocer, no longer come even from a little net in Marks & Spencer. These days vegetables are prepared and frozen and put in a box that has, on its outside, expensive color photographs—of vegetables. This is Venice.

When did Venice stop being real? After John Addington Symonds and

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Duncan Fallowell's *One Hot Summer in St. Petersburg* and *To Noto* were recently published in paperback by Vintage.

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Baron Corvo? It began earlier. In 1851, John Ruskin, outraged, reported that the arcades of the Doge's Palace were in use as a latrine—but the city had already been ruined for him by the arrival of the railway several years before. Mind you, traveling writers are always like this. I loved Penang, before the airport. Pre-airport Penang will always remain my ideal of the Oriental town: all the charms of the East in a pocket edition.

A vital ingredient of magic is that it should not be commonplace; it should be un-overrun. Democracy and magic are enemies. Magic demands the shock of the unexpected, the vibration of difference, not the comfort of sameness. The Berber boy or girl you fell in love with on the edge of the Sahara is magical in a tent a camel's ride beyond the last road, and becomes yet more magical when you discover that you have humanity in common. It may then bloom into true love. True love is magical wherever it happens, under whatever circumstances. But magic can be upsetting, is inconvenient, marks you.

For those who don't want that, there's glamour. Paris. Monte Carlo. Venice. Yes, they do sound like railway stations. These places have glamour before you go and after you come back, when the names jockey round your social life. But usually they do not have glamour while you are actually there. This is because you are too busy trying to photograph your experience with your mind.

They say Venice is beautiful. In the imagination it is spectacular, but I know if I went I'd find not spectacle but a toy. It would look smaller, more banal, the way film stars do when you chance upon them in Bond Street. It lacks mystery, lacks ambivalence. Almost everyone comes away disappointed in some respect. You get less than you pay for.

Though once the destination of haunted homosexuals from Northern Europe, though once famously licentious but civilized in the arts of heterosexual congress, Venice is no longer erotic. Desexed city of fancy, merely. In Venice you will never meet anyone. The nearest you may come to it is—well, occasionally people see themselves reflected in other people's eyes. Sometimes people imagine they've had sex in Venice, or even been smitten by someone walking down the street, but it is only imaginary. Too much imagination. Too little giving. No one gives in Venice.

The crucial factor in all adventures is "the gift"—something coming to you unannounced, unscheduled, free of charge, impossible to refuse. This could no more happen in Venice than it could in St.-Tropez. Should you by any chance imagine that you've met someone in Venice or in St.-Tropez—then take them off, out of town, anywhere, but take them away, immediately. Because only then will you be able to see them. If you remain in Venice, you will never see them. Venice is so jealous of lovers.

Venice's only chance was to become decadent, but mass tourism put a stop to that. The Victorians could enjoy Venice because for them it was a city dying. Then something terrible happened. Cryonic engineering, or a

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Guggenheim Jesus that came by and said, "Thou shalt not die. Thou shalt live as a cripple forever." Oh, yes, it has been trying to drown itself for so long, but people in suits and diamonds and richly crowned teeth, gathering in passionately concerned groups all over the planet, refuse to let it die. So it is kept on a life-support system of paralyzed myth and hard cash. Venice isn't a city but a charity. Well, of course, one couldn't let it sink without a fight, because it is a symbol of the eco-disaster waiting to engulf the world.

Cheated of its own grand demise, Venice stares at you like an idiot. Maybe once it had the good taste to be embarrassed at being an object of pity. Now it just takes everything it can get. It lacks the profundity of death, because only the living can die. *Death in Venice* is not Venice but Mann, Mahler, and Vienna (which is Venice on dry land, and much the better for it). Venice in one's thoughts keeps turning into Vienna, as, for the good of one's soul, one instinctively transfers from the sterile to the fertile. Vienna is a town filled with extraordinary and thrilling resonance; Venice is more a swamp of slurping echoes. Vienna once ruled Venice, which was never so well governed as when it was part of the Habsburg Empire. The emperor of Austria-Hungary, who liked double-barreled titles, became the king of Lombardy-Venetia.

Yes, Venice the Sterile. How sad! One searches the twentieth century in vain for an important Venetian-born artist or writer. More Italian poets have been born in Egypt (Marinetti, Ungaretti). And Venice has not served foreign poets especially well. There's a dutiful but uninspired poem by Rilke called "Late Autumn in Venice." He should have tried "Late Autumn in Oslo." Oslo, I'm sure, is not the most happening town that ever drew breath, but funnily enough, "Late Autumn in Oslo" sounds a much more interesting poem. Presumably it's the mental laziness of using Venice that is the turnoff. Italians never find inspiration there; they avoid it like the kiss of . . . mediocrity. Venice is an elision of "very nice," a place for Sunday painters and retirement holidays. Best of luck to them. I'm not attacking retired people, and I'm sure a visit to Venice is just what they want: going to the cinema in three dimensions.

Venice is retired itself, but once a year it tries to pass itself off as young. It has a carnival, a pom-pom affair for people who work on glossy magazines and in boutiques. They flap about in dominoes and crêpe de chine—there's a horrible milky shriek to it—and none of them can dance. (As for dancing, Venice's nightclubs are absolutely the worst in Italy. I have this on good authority, having lived for some time in Sicily, and Sicilians know about these things. A melancholy fact for this city of erstwhile freedom and revelry.) Byron had fun there—he was its last gasp of splendor. And freedom: where can one be free? Travelers travel in search of freedom, and must therefore avoid Venice, which is under

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permanent occupation. But even travelers, maybe, at last discover that freedom is not a question of geography—though they will learn that only by virtue of returning from some faraway place.

Riddled with Guggenheim disease (in which the skeleton gradually transfers from the interior to the exterior of the organism—the most obvious but least important symptom is scaffolding posing as foundation), and unable to drown itself, Venice lacks even the power to drown others. The great drownees, Shelley and Le Corbusier, gulped their last elsewhere. Although people do not often drown in Venice, they do get submerged, trapped in an aqua fantasy between life and death; they do not expire, but go on and on and on about it in their semi-sozzled purgatory, about this or that church, this or that palace, this or that restaurant, this or that face. But nobody ever has an adventure in Venice, just as no one ever has one in Disneyland or in Harrods. Adventure has been edited out of the program, because it is commercially unreliable.

Nothing now is possible in Venice. Its allure is a cultural Pavlovian reflex like the Pyramids or the Taj Mahal. When I visited the Pyramids, I sat in an open-air auditorium in front of those triangular shapes and listened at sunset to the *son et lumière.* Voice of Richard Burton, or someone sounding very like him, with a portentous quaver: "Long ago, lost in the distant sands of time . . ." Where the screen or proscenium should have been, there were the Pyramids, with the Sphinx in the foreground. The real thing, but shrunk to theater. It was terrific, I adored it, but I have no sensation of having actually encountered the Pyramids. They were packaged for me so that I could not touch them, and therefore they did not touch me. When I visited the Taj Mahal, it was a bright sunny morning. What one experienced in the reductive glare was an intimation of beauty rather than an encounter with it. There was this pious obligation to make the experience of the building equal to its reputation, and of course one failed. One could tick off "Taj Mahal" on one's List of Things to See Before I Die. But it has no other meaning, was no longer extraordinary. This would be Venice.

I do love the buildings of Venice's great architect Palladio, and if I went it would be for him. But in my mind Palladio is not so much Venice as Vicenza with its villas—and Palladio is England, too. I see Palladio not over water but peeping from a park among green trees and deer: gold stone and green, not Venice's gray stone and sludge.

I can't stand being herded. It is one of my problems in life. And I know there is no other way to explore Venice than as one of the herd. I wish I could be a herd member. I long for it, to be one of the crowd. I can even understand why people enjoy war, as a way of joining up with the tribe. But I don't think Venice is the place to try it: too much coming at you on the art level. And too many tourists sliding over the surface of things. Tourists are voyeurs—they do not want to be involved in the place

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they visit. They are a couple, and the location is only the backdrop to the relationship between them. Travelers travel alone or in gangs, and seek involvement. When a couple decides to travel, as opposed to tour, chances are that they will not end the journey together.

They say, "Go out of season," but so many now do that the season smears across twelve months. Venice is so packed that soon they'll be issuing tickets of admission: the end. Venice is ornate bulbousness arising from its own reflection. Narcissus is trampled underfoot. And in the wake of Guggenheim disease comes McDonald's. Is it true that you can now get Big Macs in the Piazza San Marco? I read that. And I don't mind it. It is a candid act. America doesn't have culture; it has marketing. Which is what it offers to Venice.

I have been cruel to Venice, like a thwarted lover, perhaps. My inability to have Venice, the fact that I would be forced to share it, may mean that I hate it, reject it. I don't want something that's been so passed around. Okay, it's appalling snobbery—not to discharge where all the rest have discharged. Maybe I should just grit my teeth, forget the clingfilm, and go, if only because I've always yearned to visit Venice's great antecedent, Tenochtitlán, capital of the Aztecs, arguably the greatest lacustrine city in the world. At the time of the Cortés conquest, it was larger than any city in Europe.

But what Venice might once have been in terms of romance and drama, thrilling chemical hinge between East and West, has passed to St. Petersburg, in the twentieth century the world's most dramatic city—not merely in the sense of looking dramatic, but also in the sense of involving one in drama. Adventure there is inescapable. St. Petersburg has everything Venice lacks. And it has everything Venice has (St. Petersburg was home to the most luxurious court in the history of mankind), but its style of opulence is less clogged. It even has more bridges than Venice. But it has no tourists to speak of. In that sense it is pre-Ruskinian—it's Byronic. Forgive me if I quote from a recent book of mine; it is relevant.

> They present me with a painted wooden bell which they have made themselves. And a cassette of Sergei Stadler playing the Paganini Caprices. Why, when later I listen to them, do these Caprices sound as though written for, in, and about St. Petersburg? Because this city claims everything and everyone which comes into its orbit. There is no escape from its sense of place, not even for a minute. Which is how all great cities used to be, but are no longer. They have all now joined at some level that international technoplastic club. All except this one. This is the last to go.

The nearest I've come to a real experience of Venice is reading Joseph Brodsky's *Watermark*. Brodsky fell in love with Venice because for him it

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was the sterilized, inauthentic, therefore bearable version of his hometown, St. Petersburg. One can understand his swooning disenchantment with his own country and thus with his own city. Everyone, if he has a mind, has an ambiguous, complex relationship with his own country, own city—and given the ghastly horror and magnificence of Russian history, perhaps this is truest of Russians. The expatriate option (or exile, its involuntary counterpart) can solve many problems. For me, having become captured by St. Petersburg, Venice becomes irrelevant. For Brodsky, having been rejected by St. Petersburg, Venice becomes the paramour on the rebound, because Venice never refuses an advance, is open to all. Yet *Watermark* is a thin book, a polished letter to a courtesan. Even for Brodsky, Venice is not a place where anything can happen. But that book is wonderful to read.

I own two other books about Venice. One is *Venice*, by Augustus Hare and St. Clair Baddeley, in a very fine copy that has obviously not been to Venice or indeed anywhere else. I flick . . .

> The marbles in S. Mark's make the Roman archaeologist enchanted. Nowhere, except at Ravenna, can he see such a magnificent display of the rare Cipollino Rosso, or red Carystian; breccia Corallina, Africano (Bigio and Verde), Granito Nero-bianco, porphyry, and verde-antico. Its innumerable columns are splendid quotations from the architecture of Greece and Rome—the treasures of Asia and Egypt.

Mmm, sounds good—well, perhaps if I don an antipollution mask.

The other book is *The Merchant of Venice*, which was the first play by Shakespeare that I studied as a schoolboy and is forever imprinted with the dowdiness of the late 1950s. Apart from Portia's mercy speech, the one line that has stuck in my head is *You that did void your rheum upon my beard.* Could this have been the beginning of my doubts about Venice?

I was curious to know if others had similar doubts, and asked a number of people, "What do you think of Venice?" regardless of whether or not they'd been.

Elisa (been): "I hated it. Claustrophobic."

My father (been): "A lot of oppressive religious architecture."

William Boyd (been): "Everybody should go at least once in his life—your life will be enhanced."

Anna Benn (not been): "Longing to go—but that's as far as it goes."

Gilbert and George (been): "We don't have any views on Venice. Only over-educated people have views on Venice."

Justin Wintle (been): "Just fabulous. I think it'll be the last city worth living in. When I was there, there was a convention of Danish poets. When I'm not there I think it's saccharine, but when I get there I fall in love with it again."

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James Elliott (been): "Overrated. The Piazza San Marco is a dustbin in the summer."

Bunny Dexter (been): "Adore Venice in February with fog and floods and bone-chilling cold."

Simon Burt (been): "Wonderfully beautiful, absolutely filthy. The glorious Peggy Guggenheim said that she would leave her art treasures to Venice so long as they stayed there even if the place sank. It is the most expensive city I've ever been to and fleeces the tourist with brazen cynicism—two drinks and a snack at Harry's Bar, £100. Its atmosphere depends on one's mood. It can be radiantly sunny, it can be immensely oppressive—wherever you look there's something gorgeous for the eye, and after a while it's overkill. Everything is evocative—there's no still point—on a rainy day, it's shadowy, purpled."

Natale Maganuco (been): "The feeling I had is that it has been wonderful but is now something else, something unreal. Emotionally it is lost. Beautiful scenery with the wrong actors—Germans, Japanese, etc. Even the Venetians are something unreal."

Dame Barbara Cartland (been, dozens of times): "Adore it, written heaps about it, got loads of friends there—there's a duke who gave me a party in his palace all lit up with candles, as it would have been in the eighteenth century. Venice doesn't change—which is very good today because every other place is always changing."

The foregoing jostle of voices is appropriate to any contemplation of Venice, because the place now belongs to everyone except the Venetians. (Do the Venetians exist any more than do the Ruritanians? One suspects not.) Yet Venice is not cosmopolitan—people the world over come merely to view the amazingly decked-out corpse of a unique urbanism. The true horror of Venice is that its fate could well be the fate of all beautiful places: the railed-off cameo, simultaneously trampled and isolated, forever outside us. Eventually the only truly beautiful places will be in our hearts. What a revolting thought.

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Lines on Discovering the Result of Barry McGuigan's Championship Fight While Pausing at a Hotel in Wicklow for Tea

BRIAN DOYLE

O it was a terrible blow,
The face of the proprietress crumpling
As she told me the news,
As if Barry himself had jabbed it,
Which he hadn't
Which was *exactly* the problem
During the bout,
Said her husband the proprietor,
Himself a former boxer
And proud of his past
Although as he said
He hadn't been a whole hell
Of a much of a boxer,
Just a strong little man
Who liked the dodge
And all things considered
Had been good at it,
Like Barry.
I took the county title,
Just that one year,
Wresting it from my own cousin.
O it was a terrible blow
For our mothers the sisters
To see us in the ring
Hammering on each other,

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Our jabs like the licks of snakes.
Which brings me back to Barry,
Said the proprietress.
He went down in the end,
The tenth it was said her husband
I believe it was the ninth she said
In either case
He fought like a god
And fell down broken
Like Cu Chulainn,
Blood spurting from him
In awful gushets,
Cu Chulainn of the three-colored hair,
Cu Chulainn who fought
His own brother. I wish,
Said her husband quietly,
That he would have tied
Himself to the post
Like Cu Chulainn
To the tree where he died.
O it was a terrible blow
Landed by the other fellow
And down went Barry
Blood spurting from him
In awful gushets.

Brian Doyle, editor of *Portland Magazine* at the University of Portland, is the author of two essay collections, *Two Voices* (written with his father) and *Credo*. His most recent article in the SCHOLAR was "A Small Note About *Big Red*" (Spring 1999).

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Glass Flowers

CAROLYN WEST

> *Many people think that we have some secret apparatus by which we can squeeze glass suddenly into these forms, but it is not so. We have tact.*
> —Leopold Blaschka, maker of the glass flowers at Harvard's Peabody Museum

Even the blue of this two-hour hyacinth has lasted a century.
How the artists attended—the pink in primrose so luminous
a bee is caught in its lip; here a leaf broken or starting to crisp;

even a shriveled iris giving way to a new fleur-de-lis
as in the garden, though no one comes to pinch the dead away.
Curious that tact includes decay, makes you want to know

who translated that word. Does he mean a delicate touch?
The ability to know how much heat for the silicon,
how much pressure to bring to the glass as it cools to a petal?

But not a petal. One can grow dizzy comparing things.
Drop a flower, you can pick it up again in one piece.
Press a piece of glass between your fingers, you can't bruise it.

Fragile, brittle, perishable in different manners—
how the frailties inform each other. But tell me who
can look at this bloom and not crave, not imagine scent?

Carolyn West is managing editor of Heyday Books. She coordinates the Lunch Poems Reading Series at the University of California, Berkeley.

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Millennial Sideshow

J. C. FURNAS

The Millennium turned, and that was that: no trumpets, no plagues, no famines. This must have been a crushing disappointment to the born-again broadcasters, writers, preachers, and volunteer zealots who had been training their flocks to believe that since every word in Scripture is literally true, the Tribulation—the annihilation of the world as we know it—would kick off when the ball dropped in Times Square, bringing seven years of worldwide cataclysms. "The End-Times" was the official label. The sincerity of the millions of End-Timers was unmistakable. But so was the awkward fact that, apocalyptically speaking, the night of December 31, 1999, was a colossal anticlimax.

Warnings of disappointment had been rife. The Dark Ages' buildup for the last millennium had been a notorious dud. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw many futile attempts to deduce from biblical hints just *when* the Tribulation would arrive. Scripture has always frowned on such presumption. Nevertheless, End-Timer shepherds and their loyal sheep worked up a taken-for-granted certainty that God would get it right this time around. Once again, however, the faithful were left stranded.

But some of them were also left rich. Possessed by millennial fervor, book publishers released what *Publishers Weekly* called a "tsunami" of religious titles, ranging from *Revelations 2000: Your Guide to Biblical Prophecy for the New Millennium* to *Spiritual Survival During the Y2K Crisis.* Such books dominated the religion best-seller lists. But one group of End-Time novels leaped acrobatically to the standard best-seller lists—and stayed and stayed. The *Left Behind* series, by the Reverend Tim LaHaye and Jerry B.

~ J. C. Furnas's earliest book was *Voyage to Windward: The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson* (1950); his most recent was *My Life in Writing: Memoirs of a Maverick* (1989). Furnas's latest contribution to the SCHOLAR was "Extrapolating Shakespeare: Let Will Enough Alone" (Summer 1998).

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Jenkins—six books so far, with six more scheduled to come off the assembly line during the next three years, one every six months—has sold more than ten million copies since it was launched in 1995. According to the publisher, the series' Web site receives more than eight hundred thousand electronic visits a month. This may not be the apocalypse, but it's certainly publishing history.

Before LaHaye (who is described at the end of the paperbacks as "a noted author, minister, television commentator, and nationally recognized speaker on family life and Biblical prophecy") and Jenkins ("the former vice president for publishing for the Moody Bible Institute of Chicago") came along, who had ever heard of Tyndale House, an obscure Christian publisher previously best known for *The Living Bible*? Who could have predicted that a series of novels based on the Book of Revelation would be discussed at scholarly conferences on millennial studies? Who could have prophesied the sale of bumper stickers that read "I Pull Over for the Rapture"?

The term requires a brief explanation. The Rapture, which constitutes the spectacular opening act of both the Tribulation and the *Left Behind* series, is described in Thessalonians: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. . . ." Latin translators apparently used *rapturi* for that "caught up" business. Just as raptors—hawks, eagles, ospreys—swoop down on small prey for dinner, the Rapture will similarly snatch up to Jesus all who bothered to qualify as genuinely Saved. Everybody else will be left to suffer the worst of the Tribulation: massacres, earthquakes, famines, floods. Three-fourths of the human race will be destroyed before Christ returns to usher in a thousand years of peace and harmony.

Heavily committed End-Timers may have felt a certain chagrin when January 1 rolled around and they were left unsnatched. But on the back of the spiffily designed paperbacks of *Left Behind* and its sequels (*Tribulation Force*, *Nicolae*, *Soul Harvest*, *Apollyon*, and *Assassins*), LaHaye and Jenkins beam as though they were about to walk all the way to their publisher's bank—as though, indeed, their zestful descriptions of Scripture's hideous atrocities were heavenly good news. Since the books continue to sell, and the authors continue to beam, perhaps we should conclude that the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse can't read a calendar, and that they may drop in any minute to pay us a surprise visit.

On a recent radio show, Tim LaHaye's daughter told him, rapturously, "Why, Daddy, this book will bring more people to Christ than all your other books did!" (That's saying something, since LaHaye has written more than forty books.) Then she read a letter from a listener who had lent *Left Behind* to a pop-romance buff. The friend finished the last page

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at 5:00 A.M., at which point she scrambled out of bed and fell to her knees. Not all readers end up on their knees; some just end up at the cash register of their local bookstore, clutching the next five books in the series. Before L&J sold out at my own Barnes & Noble, I figured I'd better take a look to see what all the fuss was about.

I found *Left Behind* rattling good reading, professionally terse yet fluid, a real page-turner that had somehow survived the weight of its emotional message. Suppose the late Ian Fleming had got End-Times religion and built on it a portentous Scripture-based epic in 007 style, only with a certain paucity of toothsome women. (At the very beginning, a possibility described as "drop-dead gorgeous" pops in, and though she continues to weave in and out of the action, the Rapture smothers all the erotic excitement Fleming would have wrung out of her.)

L&J have other fish to fry, crisp and flavorsome. One of the things I enjoyed was the dogged yet unobvious way they keep things clean through the whole six volumes.

The protagonists are a crack 747 pilot and the been-there, done-that star reporter for an international newsweekly. Skip their Hollywoodish names—call them Pilot and Scoop. As the first book in the series opens, Pilot is red-eyeing from O'Hare to Heathrow; Scoop is hunched over his laptop in first class. Dropdead, the beautiful chief flight attendant, bursts into the cockpit, reporting that dozens of passengers have suddenly vanished. Strangely, their dresses, trousers, socks, and underwear have all been left in pathetic huddles on their seats. No, the naked people aren't in the lavatory or, as Pilot's incredulous check determines, anywhere else. The missing include three crew members and every child on board.

Pilot's frantic report to O'Hare gets him an astonishing order to scrub the flight and come home, for chaos has broken out. All over Cook County—and everywhere else—thousands of drivers have suddenly vanished from behind their wheels with no chance to brake, so masterless cars have smashed into each other full tilt. Highways are largely impassable. Because so many airport employees have vanished from their posts, normal operations are inconceivable.

O'Hare somehow finds Pilot an available runway slot in which to land. When he finally makes his way to his home in a Chicago suburb, all that is left of his wife is an empty nightie and a wedding ring. His adolescent son's pajamas are just as empty.

Was the disappearing act caused by space aliens? High-tech weaponry? Electromagnetism combined with atomic ionization from nuclear power? After long, frantic speculation, Pilot stumbles on an implausible but persistent surmise. His marriage has been under strain because Mrs. Pilot, previously a devotee of Amway and Tupperware, went religious and joined a small, independent church committed to End-ism. It taught her

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to believe that if she accepted Jesus as her personal Savior, she would be eligible to be whirled away in "the twinkling of an eye" on what L&J describe as a "thrilling and painless journey": the Rapture. Son Raymond, also a churchgoer, has obviously been divinely snatched as well. But what of his sister, Chloe, who was no more interested in church than her father was?

After many struggles with the disrupted phone system, Pilot gets through to his daughter's college campus and learns that Chloe has not vanished. Reassuring news, yes, but with curious food for thought: Saved wife gone. Saved son gone in parallel. But un-Saved daughter . . .

In search of understanding, Pilot resorts to his wife's Bible—plentifully underlined and full of notes showing how she has been praying he will seek Savedness. It's hard going, however, when he tries to make coherent sense out of the scattered clumps of significant words in the Epistles. Revelation's welter of monsters and ominous ceremonies helps even less. Baffled, Pilot turns for guidance to his wife's church. Alas, the minister has vanished into thin air, along with most of the congregation. The young assistant pastor is still on deck, however, though nearly incapacitated by his despair over having been un-Raptured. Was it his failure to tithe 10 percent of his income to the church? Or was it those hidden copies of *Playboy*? Whatever the reason, his case failed to meet divine standards.

To his credit, instead of whining, the young pastor has pulled up his spiritual socks to soak himself and his handful of Rapture-rejects in Scripture. For now that the Rapture has come, the Tribulation is imminent, and those dying without Saved credentials are destined for perdition. Thankfully, the foresighted chief minister made a videotape, pre-snatch, explaining all this to the mini-flock he expects will be left behind. Pilot borrows it, spends some highly emotional moments communing with his VCR, and joins the ranks of the Saved. After enough foot-dragging to stretch the book to a sufficient plumpness, his daughter Chloe follows suit.

Scoop, whose masterly reporting on the Rapture includes preliminary tremors of the Tribulation, holds out until L&J introduce to the post-Rapture world the Antichrist foretold by Scripture: a Romanian politician named Nicolae Carpathia who combines Leonardo da Vinci's brains with Lord Byron's panache and Merlin's thaumaturgical prowess. Thus armed, Carpathia has no difficulty slithering into the Secretary-Generalship of the United Nations, a post he plans to dedicate to launching, managing, and glorying in the woes of the Tribulation.

Scoop's realization that the Antichrist is grabbing the reins of world power propels him swiftly toward Jesus. It doesn't hurt that he has fallen hard for the newly-Saved Chloe. At the conclusion of volume 1, Scoop has joined Pilot, Chloe, and the young pastor to form the Tribulation Force, an underground anti-Antichrist movement. "The task of the Tribulation

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Force was clear," write L&J in their begging-for-a-sequel closing paragraph, "and their goal nothing less than to stand and fight the enemies of God during the seven most chaotic years the planet would ever see."

LaHaye and Jenkins maneuver their characters toward Savedness with the deftness of experienced shepherds. They are, however, up against the novelist's usual problem of adding details worthy of the story line. Sometimes the reader feels like rapping on the table and saying: "Come on, now! Think that over!"

For example: those who believe in the soul's immortality usually assume that death must precede its flight. Scripture allows only two exceptions: God bodily took Enoch, a minor figure in Genesis, and much later sent a fiery chariot to pick up the major prophet Elijah. L&J extend this privilege to all the Saved, who swarm exultantly to heaven as though the Minsky Brothers were staging the finale of *Iolanthe*—you know, the whole cast suddenly sprout wings and soar aloft, singing: "Up in the air, sky-high, sky-high . . ." Well, maybe. But where does Scripture suggest that the Saved are stripped for takeoff? Elijah doffed his mantle to get into his chariot and Elisha picked it up, only there's no hint the old gentleman wore nothing else. And Scripture seldom missed the chance to specify nakedness when it occurred.

The issue is further complicated by the disappearance of every child on earth. The scriptural basis for this demographic overhaul must be "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God," in the Gospel of St. Mark. But once out of diapers, the children I've known have been beyond any possible plea of innocence-by-definition. Almost as rashly, L&J's Rapture accords instant immortality to the unborn. A woman in childbirth suddenly finds her belly deflated and her pains relieved; the obstetrician can find no trace of the emerging baby and must content himself with delivering the placenta. And the staffs of abortion clinics are all laid off because none of their scheduled cases needs them.

Such parturitional practical jokes defy the grim old doctrine of original sin—the unavoidable hereditary taint of Adam's misdeed in the Garden, the spiritual gene that infects the whole human race from the moment of conception. A dying baby, though it has had small chance for sinful behavior or ideas, is incapable of "accepting Jesus" or even understanding what that means. So it has had no access to the spiritual penicillin that would de-taint its soul. (That pharmaceutical metaphor is not mine; "spiritual antibiotics" are sometimes spoken of among ardent End-Timers.) So when babies' little souls abandon their foul bodies, they remain as full of original sin as Ibsen's Oswald was of syphilis. For some two thousand years, baffled thinkers have been trying to get around this. The only recourse is wishfully to suggest now and again that random

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pardons are issued. Or scrub the whole problem with Heine's cynical deathbed remark: "God will forgive me. That's his profession."

God has also presumably forgiven L&J for writing five more volumes. Our energetic authors carry the reader on through those thousands of close-set pages as smoothly as the Rapture that snatched Mrs. Pilot up to glory.

There are tribulations indeed: the earth quakes, the moon turns blood red, the sun turns black, the stars fall from the sky, demon locusts attack, two hundred million supernatural horsemen gallop into view . . . and, on the personal front, Dropdead has an affair with Carpathia the Antichrist (no details provided, of course), and gets pregnant. Her pregnancy terminates with the miscarriage of a well- but weirdly-developed shape. (No details here either. I was rooting for it to have a cloven hoof.) Chloe has better luck. She and Scoop marry (no surprise) after discovering that both are virgins (big surprise), and they have a sturdy baby.

Carpathia keeps the plot moving by introducing plenty of diabolism, debauchery, and megalomania—deposing the Pope, turning the world's religions into a monopoly, building and rebuilding New Babylon, that sort of thing. (The Tribulation Force's attempts to divert his scenario present an awkward spiritual dilemma that L&J have chosen to ignore: fighting biblical prophecy can't possibly work.) Though Carpathia prays to his boss in somewhat stilted language ("O Lucifer, son of the Morning! I have worshipped you since childhood. How grateful I am for the creativity you imbue!"), he's an interesting fellow, and I was sorry to see him assassinated in volume 6. We don't know by whom—yet—but volume 7 is due this spring.

I have little doubt that hundreds of thousands of people will buy it, and after reading its predecessors, I think I understand why.

LaHaye and Jenkins aren't your run-of-the-mill End-Timers. One of their cleverest decisions was to keep us from meeting any insufferably virtuous Christians. They're all snatched at the outset, leaving us to spend the next few thousand pages in the company of the Saved-Later and the Never-Saved, a far more bearable cast of characters than we might encounter in most religious fiction. L&J don't seem so insufferably virtuous themselves, either. What other born-again writers would have sufficient humor—and a sufficient lack of conventional piety—to dream up such pop-culture plot twists as the Antichrist's appearance on the cover of *People Magazine* under the headline "The Sexiest Man Alive"? And cloaking their message in the formulas of the contemporary thriller—political coups, car bombs, firearms ("a thirty-eight caliber police special with a four-inch barrel, loaded with high-velocity hollow-point shells")—is a brilliant stroke. The *Left Behind* series is a sheep in wolf's clothing.

LaHaye and Jenkins have taken great pains to flummox anyone who

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expects conservative Christian fiction to be old-fashioned. The backdrop of their books is today's technological playground: computers, cell phones, satellite communications, voice mail, call waiting. When the Rapture overtakes the 747 in the very first chapter, does Scoop begin to pray? Not on your life. He whips out his portable tool kit, strips the wires on the Airfone, splices them into his laptop modem, and sends his editor an e-mail.

You can get some inkling of this plugged-in modernity before you even begin the first chapter. Each book lists no fewer than three Web sites: one for the series, one for the publishing house, and one for Jerry B. Jenkins. (He actually writes the books. Tim LaHaye conceived the series.) I am told that www.jerryjenkins.com includes a list of questions frequently asked by readers, one of which is "Can't you write faster?" His answer is "Probably, but you wouldn't like the result. Two of these a year is plenty fast enough."

Too fast for me, in fact. L&J have left me exhausted. All I can hope is that as the twenty-first century marches on and no one gets snatched, they'll become exhausted, too. As far as I'm concerned, it's a good thing we won't have another millennium for a thousand years.

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Get Up to Dance

For Milton Miller

EDWIN HONIG

If I cannot write to you now I can write of you then.
A man coming out of a wall by the front door
of a four-story brick apartment house
in Brighton Beach Brooklyn,
opening on a mid-30s New Year's Eve then,
when we were younger than some of your grandchildren now—
dancing the Horah under one light
on the long dark street of Brighton Beach Brooklyn
as the biggest deep snowfall of early winter began

with the gang of us twelve tripping and flopping,
then starting up again slowly circling around,
then stopping, then shunting ahead and back,
with most of us missing steps, the first time at least,
except for Milton our guide showing
how neat it all was to do the Horah just right.

That New Year's Eve we began dancing with
the thick flakes piling up in the silent wind gusts,
and with each gust someone fell laughing
on the icy pavement, then wriggled himself straight up
as the high street-lamp swung in the wind overhead
and some of the breathless ones not getting up
until it was time for us all to get going
into all the still-much-to-do of the New Year,
that coldest winter of the mid-30s
in the brittle night air of Brighton Beach Brooklyn
with the long steady snow backing up to pounce
as we nipped from a bottle of wine when
the white snowy curtain grew too thick to see through.

And then later that winter and not too long after,
some of us started to fall without getting up—
unlike you and me, who, with the yen to rise, have done so,
wind or no wind, snow or no snow, ever since.

Edwin Honig, Emeritus Professor at Brown, is a translator and poet.

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Nabokov's Butterflies

ROBERT MICHAEL PYLE

What I remember most about that damp Swiss morning is the vibrancy of new beech leaves. Not long out of their buds, they were the essence of fragility, the definition of spring green. Beneath the beeches, by the steep path down to the lake, early purple orchids were just at their peak. Together with last year's leaf-copper, the soft leaflets, and fresh mud, they painted the path in colors richer than the wet April day gave any reason to expect. When the fog thinned and the rain came more heavily, the beeches and orchids glowed in the dull, damp light. I brachiated downhill like some anxious ape, swinging from beech to smooth wet gray beech. I was on my way to see Nabokov.

Or at least to see where he lived. I'd been attending a conservation meeting at Morges, west of Lausanne on Lake Geneva. The meeting finished, I had a couple of days before I was due back in England, where I lived at the time. I had recently read *Speak, Memory*, and was aware that its author, Vladimir Nabokov, lived up-lake at Montreux. I didn't know much of Nabokov's literary writings (having read, besides the memoir, only *Lolita*), but I had long been aware of his Lepidoptera work. I had recently concluded postgraduate studies in butterfly eco-geography at Yale with Charles Remington, who had known Nabokov and spoke of him often. Nabokov had named the Karner Blue. Some of us working to conserve this endangered butterfly had sought his support, and he had given it. I wanted to thank him directly. With the brash confidence of one still in his twenties, I supposed that if I just showed up, I might meet him. Maybe if I invoked the name of Remington, I thought, I could gain entry long enough to pay my respects. As for Montreux, all I knew of it was the jazz

Robert Michael Pyle is co-editor and annotator of *Nabokov's Butterflies*, to be published in April by Beacon Press. This article is adapted from his introductory essay.

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festival and Chillon Castle, the latter via an image drawn from slides taken by my grandmother and great-aunt years before. I had heard the town was pricey, and the name of Nabokov's residence—the Montreux Palace Hotel—was intimidating. When my train arrived, my impression was confirmed: the hotel was a baroque fortress. I thought of going there right away, but it was early evening and I didn't want to arrive at dinnertime. Hungry, and concerned about lodgings, I found a small pizza and a glass of wine for seven francs. By phone, I got a room for eighteen francs in a small hotel on the mountainside at Caux. Reaching it entailed taking the Montreux Oberland Bernois, a funicular train. The ticket and a footpath map cost another seven francs, leaving twelve undedicated francs in my wallet.

The last railcar of the evening was about to depart, so I jumped aboard and scaled the steep mountainside on the same cog railway that Dick Diver had fatefully taken in *Tender Is the Night,* a book Nabokov thought "magnificent." Just as F. Scott Fitzgerald had described, "After it cleared the low roofs, the skies of Vaud, Valais, Swiss Savoy, and Geneva spread around the passengers in cyclorama," only now those skies were slaty dark. I looked out the pine-framed windows and watched the lights of Montreux recede. The other passengers disembarked at Glion, and I arrived at my aerie, the station hotel at Caux, by myself. Dr. Diver had been bound for a Caux hotel too, a rather fancier one, where he found the orchestra playing "Poor Butterfly." My simple lodging had no orchestra, but it did have a lake view and fresh, cold air from the forest all around. Warm beneath a huge duvet, I resolved to approach the Palace on the morrow. At worst I would be turned away; at best, I might meet the man who had described and helped to save the Karner Blue.

The morning view took in a forested ravine and a spruce-clad, snow-dotted mountain. Alpine meadows, more brown than green, stretched uphill. I imagined the butterflies summer would bring: Parnassians, Alpines, Fritillaries; no doubt Nabokov knew them well. Nothing was visible below through the thickset fog, but I imagined him down there, at breakfast. Perhaps if we did meet, he would tell me where to seek the rarer *Erebia* on some future visit. Despite the rain, I set out with high hopes.

Maybe my mistake was deciding to hike back down instead of taking the railway. The descent through the beeches and orchids was exhilarating; my spirits rose for the potential encounter. But then the rain picked up: all the way down it fell hard and solid. When I struck the lakeshore, wet through, I found myself at the castle, and I knew I mustn't go home and tell Aunt Helen I'd skipped it. I couldn't afford the stiff admission fee, so I walked around the grounds of the romantic pile plunked onto the shores of Lake Geneva, backed by glaciated alps and high white valleys. The heavy round turret of Chillon seemed to hold down the wave-lapped stones at its base. My hotel's *petit déjeuner* had been mighty *petit,* so I bought a small snack and ate it by the château portcullis, wondering if

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the Nabokovs' Palace would prove as impenetrable as Château de Chillon.

But I was stalling. I walked the Quai, the lakeshore promenade, spotted my first Pied Flycatcher, and continued past the hotel and on to the station. A train was about to leave for Geneva. I could not afford to stay another night, and by taking the train I might get to fly standby to London a day early. I was soaked, muddy, chilled, disheveled, hungry, broke, and fresh out of the morning's ebullience. Surely the liveried doorman would sneer at my long beard, rude clothing, and muttered English, and turn me away. Or if I did gain entrance to the sanctum, what would I say to Mr. and Mrs. Nabokov, after I had thanked them for writing on behalf of the Karner Blue and given them the Remingtons' greetings?

Of course I should have had faith in the ability of any two lepists to talk endlessly about butterflies and moths. I should have expected that Nabokov's civility toward someone he would accept as a "fellow sufferer" of the *morbus et passio aureliani* would overcome his storied hauteur and my obvious ignorance. At least I should have tried. But I didn't. I boarded the train—perhaps the first time I had ever ventured nothing when adventure beckoned—and rolled off toward Geneva, dripping in my seat, now certain that my twenties were about over. Hell, I figured; I'll be back—there will be more meetings in Morges. Next time, I'll ask Remington to write in advance, and I'll have read more of Nabokov's work.

Two months later, in a Cambridge tea shop, I opened a copy of the *Guardian* and read that Vladimir Nabokov was dead.

Though many people associate Nabokov with butterflies, they usually misunderstand the connection. I frequently hear some earnest student, reader, or critic say that Nabokov was "a butterfly buff," or that he had "an incurable obsession" with butterflies. The one trivializes a great passion; the other conflates abiding love with neurosis. Or I'll hear ill-informed statements likening Nabokov's affinity for Lepidoptera to some sick tangency to female exploitation, à la John Fowles's *The Collector* or Thomas Harris's *The Silence of the Lambs.* Others settle for cheap shots about his fixation on butterfly genitalia—for example, this egregious idiocy from a draft manuscript for a national magazine, which I was asked to read and was fortunately able to derail:

> [Butterflies] are sexy, too. Besides their beauty, the insects' mating habits seem to hold a strong fascination for aficionados. Nabokov, author of *Lolita* and other best sellers, was proud of his collection of Lycaenid [*sic*] male genitalia, which he kept, coated in glycerin and meticulously labeled, in vials in his office.

As if his attention to butterfly genitalia—reliable taxonomic clues for the species he worked on—had anything prurient about it! An old story has

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Nabokov working on specimen preparations at Harvard, when he is called away to show visiting alumni around the museum. With his genitalic preps sitting in potassium hydroxide, he grows impatient and says, "Excuse me, I must go play with my genitalia." One can almost imagine him making such a crack out of sheer, punning irreverence. But Nabokov's work with his beloved Blues—the small blue butterflies of the family Lycaenidae that entranced him for decades—was far more than play. Few realize that he was a lepidopterist of consequence, or even understand what that implies. Even other lepidopterists sometimes think of him as a dilettante or dabbler, of little lasting impact on the field. This is a mistaken impression.

Butterflies and moths represented far more to Nabokov than a hobby or an eccentricity. But for chance, they might have been his true métier. I know of no piece of writing that better expresses what it is to be enchanted by these insects than chapter 6 of *Speak, Memory.* It thrillingly evokes the awakening of this passion in his young life, and how it carried him into the future. The lepidopterist Ronald Wilkinson reread this chapter every spring, to savor the collecting season before the first butterflies emerged and he could actually get out there. No one can read the concluding passage without sensing what these glittering insects meant to Nabokov, and no one should read anything else by him without this knowledge. "The highest enjoyment of timelessness," he wrote, " . . . is when I stand among rare butterflies and their food plants. This is ecstasy." Nabokov's devotion to butterflies and moths colored the rest of his life: where he went, what he did, whom he knew, and how he wrote. Butterflies constantly flitted in and out of his awareness, often alighting on the paper he wrote on and remaining there, immortal specimens pressed between pages.

Nabokov wrote on many levels, dispersing his diverse knowledge liberally. His genius sustains his stories apart from specialized facts, but a working knowledge of French, Russian, Russian poets, chess, or a dozen other topics can enhance the reader's pleasure. One of the most telling subtexts is Lepidoptera. Lepidopterists, and general readers who acquaint themselves with the field, can appreciate Nabokov's oeuvre on a level that others will miss. In some of the poems, several of the short stories, and many of the novels, butterflies and moths impinge on the text dramatically. Even in works that seem devoid of any lepidopteral theme, allusions, images, and tropes pop up from that compendious file in the writer's mind.

As *Speak, Memory* attests, sun and butterflies defined a good day for the young Nabokov at Vyra, his family's country estate: "From the age of seven, everything I felt in connection with a rectangle of framed sunlight was dominated by a single passion. If my first glance of the morning was for the sun, my first thought was for the butterflies it would engender."

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Besides a supple intelligence, the boy had advantages that enabled him to become a learned lepidopterist by the age of nine. His father, who had been a collector, passed on to him the basics of lepidopterology and the local fauna, as well as encouragement for the pursuit. Parental indifference or discouragement ordinarily vies with adolescent peer pressure to terminate a young entomologist's career before it begins, and butterfly nets become social liabilities. Tutored at home and nurtured in outdoor enthusiasms by both parents, the boy had no such impediments. Summer travels with his family and tutors took him to exotic locales like Biarritz, where he expanded his collection of butterflies. In the attic at Vyra, he discovered "armloads of fantastically attractive volumes," including Maria Sibylla Merian's seventeenth-century paintings of Surinamese insects, "Esper's noble *Die Schmetterlinge*" of 1777, and Adalbert Seitz's *Die Gross-Schmetterlinge der Erde* ("a prodigious picture book").

Discovering a new species became his fondest fantasy. His first proposal of a name for an unfamiliar variety, sent to the great Russian specialist Kuznetsov, yielded only a "gruff reference to 'schoolboys who keep naming minute varieties of the Poplar Nymph!'" The rebuke did not dampen the schoolboy's ardor. He could not have foreseen that he would later name a butterfly for the nineteenth-century lepidopterist Samuel Scudder, by then his idol, or that he would live and collect in the territory covered by Scudder's "stupendous work on the *Butterflies of New England.*"

Nabokov's idyll at Vyra was abruptly ended by the Bolshevik Revolution and the family's resulting dislocations. Their rustication in the Crimea, however, led to his first scientific publication, on the area he considered to be the entomological "connecting link between the Balkan and Caucasian districts." "A Few Notes on Crimean Lepidoptera" (1920) listed the species found, as well as its botanical and landscape associations, setting a pattern for future papers in which Nabokov would narrate the results of memorable field trips. Though that paper was chiefly an annotated list, there is a hint of the fine descriptive prose that would bloom in later papers. *Erebia afra,* the sole species seen of a genus he loved, elicited a lyrical portrait; and Nabokov allowed himself an elegiac note at the end, likening a Crimean hawkmoth to one he used to find at the foot of aspens, at home "in happier days." But the enchanted days of summery treks across the butterfly-filled bogs near Vyra were finished forever, and the pain of that loss would never fade.

Nabokov went on to Trinity College, Cambridge. Here, I think, his path bifurcated. Had he come under the sway of Cambridge zoologists, he might have pursued natural history professionally. But as Brian Boyd reveals in his splendid *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years,* the Cantabrigian period (1919–1922) was curiously light on scientific involvement. Zoology lectures on fish dissection left Nabokov cold, and he switched his studies to French and Russian language and literature. Familiar with the

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material, Nabokov sailed on to a quick honors degree, while concentrating on sports, poetry, and mild revelry. In *Speak, Memory,* he listed "the things I went in for," other than literature, as "entomology, practical jokes, girls, and, especially, athletics." That is the sole mention of entomology in his account of his three years at Cambridge.

Why not more natural history? As Boyd makes clear, Nabokov's preoccupation with his lost home in the delicious countryside at Vyra inspired a constant flow of poetry concerned almost exclusively with Russia. He also threw himself into sport and socializing to an extent that left scant time for butterflies. He admired the Cambridge poet Rupert Brooke, and recognized his "heart's attachment" to the local countryside; but to Nabokov the same terrain suggested only "humble humdrumness" (do we detect a pre-echo of the name of a future novel's protagonist?). He would later describe the routine New England butterflies as "pathetically dull," compared with the delights of the West—"rather like a garden in Cambridgeshire after a summer in the mountains of Spain." But Nabokov also spent summers in London and Berlin, and springs largely taking exams, so it may be that in Cambridge he simply never had much chance to swing a net.

After graduation he was off to the Continent, and, soon, to life with his wife, Véra, and their young son, Dmitri, in expatriate literary colonies. Collecting again, for the first time in a decade, he published an account of a trip to the Pyrénées-Orientales and the Ariège, in southern France (1931), full of the wonder of new habitats and fresh fauna. By then he had lost any inhibitions about expressing his feelings and perceptions in an entomological article, and parts of it read much like his fiction. The piece opens with a "pleasant though silly dream" involving what seemed to be a sardine, but was actually the moth-mimic of a flying fish. The rest exhibits his hallmark attention to detail, both of the scene—"a bright little lamp," "people intent on the process of digestion . . . strolling up and down in the darkness with glowing cigars," "a pathetic wing in a spider's web"—and of the butterflies: "fine specimens of a milk chocolate colour," "The fulvous band between the inner and outer lines is very conspicuous and the lunules are perfectly distinct." The elegiac note remains ("I was charmed to see together two insects that are seldom met with together . . . *P. aegeria and Aglia tau,* so remindful of boyhood and spring in Northern Russia"). Butterflies were still intensely evocative and exciting, but literature had begun to supersede science, a pattern that would seldom be fully reversed.

When the Nabokovs moved to the United States in 1940, the forty-one-year-old writer zealously resumed his involvement with lepidopterology. While seeking literary employment in New York City, he visited the American Museum of Natural History. William Comstock, a member of its entomology department, was Nabokov's first real advocate

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as an entomologist in this country. He gave the obviously talented immigrant full access to the museum's collection and working space, and taught him the fundamentals of genitalic dissection. Here Nabokov began his long-term work on the genus of Blues known as *Lycaeides;* coming home from his earliest American forays, he deposited his specimens in the museum's trays. Forced to leave one batch of specimens in St. Petersburg and another in Yalta, Nabokov never maintained a large personal collection in this country, but donated prepared material to whatever museum he happened to be associated with at the time. During his unsettled New York period, as contemporary letters show, he found an intellectual and emotional anchor at the Museum of Natural History, where Comstock and others provided collegiality and fueled his hopes that he might make a significant contribution to the field.

In 1941 Nabokov obtained a lectureship at Wellesley College. It was followed by a series of temporary positions at Wellesley and Harvard. In the "other" Cambridge, he became a part-time research fellow in Entomology and curator of Lepidoptera at Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology. In *Speak, Memory,* Nabokov wrote that it was a long time before he met a "fellow sufferer" of the Lepidoptera pursuit. At Harvard he met two: Harry Clench, son of the MCZ mollusk curator, who was soon to leave for graduate study in Michigan; and Charles Remington, then a graduate student, and later my mentor at Yale. These were real lepidopterists. Together, in 1947, they co-founded the Lepidopterists' Society, a confederacy of which Nabokov became a charter member. Having such colleagues at Harvard mattered greatly to Nabokov. When he brought novelties back from collecting trips, he needed fellow enthuasiasts with whom he could share his excitement and pore over the catch. Returning from Vermont after his first encounter with the sought-after Northern Hairstreak *(Eurystrymon ontario),* for example, he pounced on Remington to tell him about it. Remington later spoke of "the joy we had" at such times, a joy known by every butterfly hunter who has ever shared his bag with another. On the whole, as Nabokov wrote in *Strong Opinions,* "The years at the Harvard Museum remain the most delightful and thrilling of all my adult life."

Vladimir, Véra, and Dmitri moved to Cornell—another institution with a long tradition of scientific butterfly studies—in 1948. Nabokov held a professorship in Russian literature, but he was welcomed by such lepidopterists as John Franclemont, one of the foremost students of noctuid moths (commonly called "millers"). Franclemont, now Professor Emeritus at Cornell, is fond of wordplay, and he liked swapping puns and word games with Nabokov. But they did not discuss literature in the laboratory. "At his home and in the field," says Franclemont, "conversation ranged more widely. But when Nabokov crossed campus, he became a lepidopterist."

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During his twenty years in America, Nabokov crossed the country as well as the campus in search of Lepidoptera. With Véra and usually Dmitri, he journeyed west almost every summer to collect butterflies and work on his books. Sites in Colorado, Wyoming, and Utah were butterfly Valhallas. Nabokov didn't drive, so at first they accepted rides or took public transportation to areas near the lodge or motel where they had set up headquarters; then he ranged out, mostly on foot, to roam the countryside and collect. Nabokov often walked ten or twenty miles in a day's collecting. Later, Véra learned to drive and chauffeured her husband to the butterfly grounds. Several of these trips were directed toward specific populations of orange-bordered Blues that Nabokov needed to examine for his classic studies on these bright insects. Other trips were tied to lectures, readings, or teaching. Summer breaks were extremely important to him, since, between teaching and writing, he often felt overworked during the school year. Nabokov devised schemes for spending as much time afield as possible. In bad weather, he would remain in the lodge or motel room writing, ready to dart out with the first rays of the sun. According to Brian Boyd, his method of writing—on index cards—grew out of the practice of keeping butterfly notes on such cards.

Nabokov's days afield near Longs Peak, a high Colorado summit in Rocky Mountain National Park, were among his most prized. The astonishing bit of time travel at the end of chapter 6 in *Speak, Memory*—when he sets out on a morning's expedition on the bogs beyond Vyra, and ends up among the Ponderosa Pines and Mariposa Lilies in the shadow of Longs Peak, some forty years later—expresses the magic of his passion as piquantly as anything he ever wrote.

What were Nabokov's actual contributions to the science of lepidopterology? First, his technique of measuring the patterns of scales, by counting, numbering, and quantitatively comparing their rows, was a novel and ingenious method. The fact that few, if any, others adopted it says more about the conservatism of science than about the shortcomings of the technique. Because he did not employ the complex mathematics of the modern morphometricians, his results are sometimes pooh-poohed. But his method was his own, and no one before or since has undertaken the almost incredibly precise, scale-by-scale mapping that enabled Nabokov to untangle the relationships of pattern development and geographic variation. As the robustness of his taxonomy shows, this painstaking labor proved much more than a fussy fixation with form and natural artistry.

In biology, those who classify animals and plants are known as taxonomists and systematists. Their work is essential if we are to make anything coherent out of the complexity of life. Taxonomists study the characters that organisms have in common, furnish their names, and assign them to

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categories (*taxa*). Systematists organize these taxa into theoretical phylogenies, or evolutionary lines of relationship. Teasing out the details in the taxonomic puzzle was Nabokov's passion. He relished the extreme attention to detail—"the tactile delights of precise delineation"—that taxonomy required, not unlike that demanded by an intricate plot or an elegant chess problem. In particular, he chose to unravel the knot of names used for the orange-bordered Blues (genus *Lycaeides*) of the Northern Hemisphere, the Blues of the New World tropics, and a group of Satyrs then called *Neonympha*. In so doing he named a number of taxa and revised (i.e., defined) these groups as he understood them. Nabokov's classification of Blues and Satyrs was perceptive, and has profoundly affected all modern work on the same groups.

Though many lepidopterist authors erected large numbers of scientific names, few attempted anything as ambitious as Nabokov undertook when he became "first reviser" of the Latin American Blues. Fewer still enjoyed such survivorship among the names they devised. Nabokov named ten new species or subspecies, renamed another, and erected nine genera of American Blues. Of the twenty names to which his own is affixed as author, fifteen remain valid, a fine batting average for any taxonomist. When he made mistakes, they arose from incomplete collections and inadequate literature. Lacking the pertinent journals, for example, he misapplied the preoccupied name *Pseudothecla* to a new genus. Out of high respect for his work, Francis Hemming renamed it *Nabokovia*.

"As someone who always valued the individuating detail," Brian Boyd has written, Nabokov was "temperamentally a splitter"—a taxonomist who recognizes and elevates distinct differences between types. (Those who tend to blur such differences into more generalized types are called "lumpers.") Nabokov, however, was no arbitrary splitter; his separations were based on a keen discrimination of meaningful traits. He deplored the proliferation of meaningless names for local variants, and the naming of "subspecies" based merely on locality labels rather than on precisely observed morphology (a common practice of certain German dealers, who named "different" Parnassians from nearly every valley in the Alps).

When Harvard mounted an exhibition in 1988 to celebrate Nabokov's work, one descriptive label stated, "His scientific contributions were primarily descriptive, rather than synthetic." In a *Harvard Magazine* article about the man and his butterflies, professors Deane Bowers and Frank Carpenter were quoted as relegating Nabokov's work to the realm of the amateur. But it would be wrong to read "amateur" as a pejorative. As Carpenter himself noted, amateur natural history draws on an aristocratic Old World tradition: "Indeed, if you go back far enough, almost all the work was done by amateurs." Not only is this becoming the case again, as systematics falls out of fashion and museum retirees go unreplaced, but it wasn't so rare in Nabokov's time. An informal head count by Kurt John-

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son of the American Museum of Natural History showed that fewer than 10 percent of the curators of major institutions with active Lepidoptera collections had Ph.D.'s when Nabokov was there and at Harvard. Moreover, Nabokov did publish in professional journals; and if "professional" implies being paid, recall that for six years he was employed at the Museum of Comparative Zoology. The "descriptive, rather than synthetic" label overlooked the results of his labors in that very lab. His great appraisal of the *Lycaeides* Blues is indeed expertly descriptive, but it also tightly assimilates masses of experience on the insects' ecology, biogeography, phenology, life history, and evolution: it is precisely, in a word, synthetic.

In the famous cetology chapter of *Moby-Dick,* Melville nicely exemplifies the distinction between taxonomists and systematists. "I shall not pretend to a minute anatomical description of the various species," he writes. "My object here is simply to project the draught of a systematization of cetology. I am the architect, not the builder." From that perspective, Nabokov was a master builder. Melville also described classification as "a ponderous task; no ordinary letter-sorter in the Post-office is equal to it." Anyone reading extracts of Nabokov's scientific papers will appreciate the industry and exactitude that he brought to the task, the sheer amount of hard work his revisions required, and the depth of thought that went into them. The edifice he built, a house of blue butterflies, has stood up well.

Nabokov also left his mark on conservation. The Karner Blue Project drew sustenance from his support, expressed in a letter to Cornell's Robert Dirig, then director of the Xerces Society and a major player in the Karner Blue conservation effort, in which I had participated as the society's founder. Dirig later wrote, "It is fortunate that this butterfly was described by Vladimir Nabokov (1943), a literary genius of this century, whose celebrity has enhanced preservation efforts." Nabokov had collected the subspecies—which "fluttered around like snowflakes" when encountered by his fictional Professor Pnin—from a village near its stronghold in New York's Albany Pine Bush on June 2, 1950, eight years after he had described it from specimens that his revered Samuel Scudder had reared eight decades before. Nabokov's taxonomic work revealed that the species name *scudderi,* then used for this highly restricted subspecies of the Melissa Blue in the Northeast, properly applied to a subspecies of the Northern Blue in Manitoba. That left the northeastern Melissa Blue without a valid scientific name. Nabokov rechristened it *Lycaeides melissa samuelis,* thus doubly honoring Scudder.

In recent decades, as its habitats from the Upper Midwest to New England have been altered by development and fire suppression, the Karner Blue and its lupine host plant have grown ever rarer. Sparked by a Xerces Society campaign, public concern led to its listing as a state en-

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dangered species in New York, and then, in 1994, as a federal endangered species. In a 1952 *New York Times* review of A. B. Klots's *A Field Guide to the Butterflies of North America,* Nabokov wrote that "the lupines and *Lycaeides samuelis* Nab. are still doing as fine under those old gnarled pines along the railroad as they did ninety years ago." Today the Karner Blues and their "sandy and flowery little paradise," as Nabokov described the habitat, are doing less well. Would he be amazed or amused to learn that the butterfly he shared with his admired antecedent Scudder is now under federal protection, and that he had helped give it a chance to survive into the next millennium?

Nabokov anticipated a major contemporary issue in butterfly conservation, expressing equal disdain for commercial collectors of the delicately green, stained-glass-like, long-tailed Isabella Silkmoth (*Graellsia isabellae*) in its few endangered colonies in France; and for officious wardens who would "forbid an old naturalist to move about with his old net" in the habitat of the Iolas Blue (*Iolana iolas*), where collecting could have no impact, but where "the unnecessary destruction of its vineyard host plants will surely wipe it out." His conclusion that "the real culprits" were habitat destroyers, not collectors, speaks for many lepidopterists today. So does his contempt for "ignorance and pedantry," drawing attention away from habitats while frustrating "the scientist without whom a policeman could not tell a butterfly from an angel or a bat."

Nabokov followed the rules and observed proper protocol for collecting specimens. He sampled selectively, took good care of his specimens, and made the best scientific use of those he brought back to the lab and museum. In later interviews, he frequently condemned the indiscriminate use of pesticides. Yet by nature he was optimistic about butterflies' chances in the long run against inept humanity.

Nabokov envisioned several books devoted solely to butterflies—works on European and North American Lepidoptera, a treatment of butterflies in art, and a blend of "science, art, and entertainment" that would touch on mimetic adaptation, as well as on his "adventures with leps." As Charles Remington writes, "None came to fruition; but what fascination there would have been in his versions of any of these!" Even so, Nabokov remains the foremost literary interpreter of butterflies and moths. Of those writers who have addressed both insects and literature—Jean-Henri Fabre, Edwin Way Teale, William Beebe, Don Marquis, Vincent Dethier, Howard Ensign Evans, E. O. Wilson, Bernd Heinrich, John Alcock, Sue Hubbell, and A. S. Byatt come to mind—only Miriam Rothschild, John Burns, and a few others have been lepidopterists. No one approaches Nabokov's dual expertise in fiction and lepidopterology.

The *Boston Globe* science columnist Chet Raymo has written that for Nabokov, "lepidopteral details—patterns, shapes, colors, textures . . . resonated

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everywhere—in language, literature, love and life—enriching and deepening his experience in a way that scientists seldom share." As a happy result, the language in Nabokov's scientific writing is often indistinguishable from that of his literary prose. It was the genius of the young Charles Remington, as founding editor of the *News of the Lepidopterists' Society,* not to constrain Nabokov's American English within the bounds of standard scientific language. Among precise accounts of species found, Nabokov's papers in the *News* include images like "Plunging into the forest . . . on the western slopes of the Snowy Range, I found [bog Fritillaries] on a small richly flowered marsh"; and "acting on a hunch, I visited a remarkably repulsive-looking willowbog, full of cowmerds and barbed wire."

Nabokov sometimes began a treatise with his good-faith idea of scientific writing—passive verbs, third person, impartial and unornamented phrasing—and then picked up lyric momentum. "Notes of the Morphology of the Genus *Lycaeides*" begins, "Out of the hundred or so holarctic Lycaenids distributed among at least sixteen genera of the subfamily *Plebejinae* (definitely fixed by Stempffer, 1937, Bull. soc. ent. France 42:211, etc.; not covering the superficial concept of 'Blues' for which no systematic term or division can exist)." It concludes with a memorable sentence, one that would be at home in any of Nabokov's literary works, invoking "the whole of China, the whole of the Moon," and a nameless collector situated "between climb and cloud on some mountain thousands of miles away from the describer's desk."

In that same vein, Nabokov slipped lyrical language and informal prose into ordinarily stolid journals: "the smaller, dapper *atrapraetextus*"; "well formed, fattish falx"; "this clinches the matter"; "locality wiggle" (for a place label); genitalic processes whose shapes were "fish-like," "asparagus-like," "whip-like," or like "a headless dromedary." Even the most functionally descriptive paragraphs show the glister of the natural verbal colorist: "The *scintillant pulvis:* structural scales more or less extensively dusting with metallic greenish blue . . . or turquoise . . . leaving the scintillae as seapools are left by the sea at low tide."

Nabokov thought that the gulf between scientific and artistic expression was not insuperable, that the two genres could even meet. In a lecture on one of Dickens's greatest novels, he declared, "All we have to do when reading *Bleak House* is to relax and let our spines take over. Although we read with our minds, the seat of artistic delight is between the shoulder blades. That little shiver behind is quite certainly the highest form of emotion that humanity has attained when evolving pure art and pure science. Let us worship the spine and its tingle. Let us be proud of being vertebrates, for we are vertebrates tipped at the head with a divine flame." And later, "What is the joint impression that a great work of art produces upon us? . . . The Precision of Poetry and the Excitement of Science."

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In an interview for the *Saturday Review,* he said that he was "certainly not afraid to bore readers with nature notes worked into a memoir or story. I am afraid to trim my science to size or—what is much the same—not to take full advantage of my art in speaking of 'scientific' details." Ultimately, the writer/biologist yearned to reconcile his competing, collaborating talents and desires. In a tough review of a book on Audubon's butterflies, he asked, "Does there not exist a high ridge where the mountainside of 'scientific' knowledge joins the opposite slope of artistic imagination?" As well as anywhere, that territory may be sought in Nabokov's ambidextrous work.

For Nabokov, the dialectic between Lepidoptera and literature, which entrances critics and compulsive hair-splitters, simply did not exist. Thus the biographer Andrew Field's statement that Nabokov's butterflies "sometimes seem an amazing stylistic mannerism" seems especially silly. Perhaps such a striking misapprehension should not be surprising from someone who had a "loathing for Lepidoptera," as Nabokov said of Field in a letter written to him in 1966. Surely it would be difficult to know anything at all about Nabokov's life and not see that butterflies and moths inhabited the center of his soul.

In any discussion of Nabokov and butterflies, his 1955 novel *Lolita* inevitably comes up. Comparing Humbert Humbert's pursuit of Dolores Haze and Clare Quilty to a butterfly hunt is a cliché that few commentators have managed to avoid. Obviously the narrative contains elements of the lepidopterist's outing, tracking desirable prey from habitat to preferred or deduced habitat. More interesting to me is the fact that Nabokov wrote much of the book—by far his most commercially successful—on the road during actual butterfly-hunting expeditions in the West. A BBC television documentary on the writing of *Lolita* staged an imaginary scene in which Véra Nabokov is driving and Vladimir is revising text, tossing rejected index cards out the window. No holographic manuscript of the book exists, only a stack of cards on which he stored notes for the book. (I have imagined finding a cache of discards, yellowed and nibbled, in a Bushy-tailed Woodrat's nest; now that would be a catch!) I find the image of those tossed-out words floating across the Wyoming countryside, like big white butterflies, to be a much more compelling connection than the facile one that is often made. And as Brian Boyd pointed out to me, it also echoes a scene in *Look at the Harlequins,* when a wind-whipped piece of yellow paper seems to metamorphose into a Sulfur butterfly on a clover head.

Nabokov vigorously maintained that there was no connection between his science and his characters' sometimes dark lives. But the connections between entomology and literature seem almost endless. Lepidopterists' names are scattered throughout his work. The fictional post-editor of

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Lolita is named for John Ray, an important seventeenth-century systematist. Bill Uhler, "the dragonfly man" in "The Admirable Angle-wing," recalls the namesake of Uhler's Arctic, *Oeneis uhleri.* Real lepidopterists (himself in cameo in *Pnin,* Gregory Grum-Grzhimaylo in *The Gift*) and imaginary ones (Paul Pilgram in "The Aurelian") play both principal and walk-on parts in Nabokov's tales.

Butterfly names occur often. Nabokov took pleasure in mingling the nomenclature of the creatures and their discoverers in his fictional landscapes. In *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle* (1969), "Ladoga," the birthplace of Ada's mother, in the state of "Mayne," also happens to be the subgenus of the European White Admirable butterfly. In Colorado, Lolita and Humbert dally between "Snow" and "Elphinstone." These reflect Snow's Copper (*Lycaena cupreus snowi*) and *Elphinstonia charlonia* (the Greenish Blacktip), both at home among high-altitude cliffs and rocky places. The former, brilliant as a molten ingot, Nabokov collected near Telluride, Colorado. The latter, a lovely lemony Sulfur, he had hoped to collect in the Atlas Mountains. Our playful author has left hundreds of such gifts for lepidopterist-readers; Joann Karges teases out many of them in *Nabokov's Lepidoptera: Genres and Genera.*

Besides name play, Nabokov injected his fiction with strong doses of real natural history. In *The Gift,* for example, Fyodor records the precourtship behavior of violet-tinged Coppers as they "tangled in lightning-swift flight in midair," while an Amandus Blue, a Freya Fritillary that "flicked among the Selenas," and a small hummingbird moth went about their business. The whole company told him the progress of the season, and affected him deeply. When he tucked these wonderful layers of detail into his creations, Nabokov was having fun, but he was also blending his driving passions in a manner that respected and celebrated both. As he wrote of Fyodor, "The divine meaning of his wood meadow was expressed in its butterflies"—and the whole world was his wood meadow.

One of Nabokov's loveliest poems may shadow back to his first thrill of lepidopterological discovery. In *Speak, Memory,* he tells of coming across a handsome little moth when he was ten years old, and taking it for a new species. He wrote up his find and submitted it to Professor Richard South of London, who replied with the disappointing news that the moth had previously been described as *Plusia excelsa* from specimens taken at St. Petersburg. The eager young lepidopterist had been gazumped. His disappointment later made ripples in both *Laughter in the Dark* (where he names a blind man "Kretschmar," after the person who had named "his" moth) and *The Gift* (in which Fyodor's father experiences a similar disappointment). I believe that fundamental episode also colored the poem "Lines Written in Oregon," inspired by a mountain outing during the summer of 1953, which the Nabokovs spent mostly in Ashland.

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The poem begins, "Esmeralda! Now we rest / Here in the bewitched and blest / Mountain forests of the West"; mentions a "peacock moth on picnic table"; and concludes with the line "Esmeralda, *immer, immer.*" Brian Boyd explains the enchanted theme in terms of "the magic of the Europe Nabokov derived from and rediscovers here in the American West." Lepidopteran images in Nabokov are seldom if ever casual, and the appearance of the picnic-table moth adds to the witchery. There has been much speculation about the identity of "Esmeralda," but my own investigation of lepidopteran candidates by that name convinces me that the reference is to an Oregon moth closely related to the one Nabokov had "discovered" as a boy. Though the Oregon moth is two or three species removed from the original, *Plusia esmeralda* is the nearest name Nabokov would have found for it in the standard checklist of that time. When the poet wrote "Esmeralda, *immer, immer,*" he may have sighed for his own first, sweet discovery.

Something of that original thrill would revive when Nabokov, as a young man, found a striking Alpine novelty, which he described in "A Discovery." That poem has been incorrectly cited as applying to both the Karner Blue and Dorothy's Satyr; in fact it clearly pertains to *Lysandra cormion,* which later turned out to be a hybrid of two other species. The poet claims to "want no other fame" than the label designating him as its first describer. It was a distinction he would achieve many times in the years to come, if never with quite the poignancy of that first fresh moth.

Of his two devotions, literature and Lepidoptera, the latter—though this may sound heretical to some Nabokovians—may have been the greater. Passages in *Speak, Memory,* and statements in interviews, suggest the primacy of this passion. And had things gone differently, Nabokov might be better known as an entomologist than as a writer. As he told the *Paris Review,* "It is not improbable that had there been no revolution in Russia, I would have devoted myself entirely to lepidopterology and never have written any novels at all." But the Revolution did occur, dashing any hopes he may have had of financing a great Asiatic expedition with his inherited fortune. Instead, in *The Gift,* he created Konstantin Godunov-Cherdyntsev, the lepidopterist he would have liked to become.

"Nabokov never achieved the scientist's unity of vision," contends Raymo, the *Boston Globe* writer, adding, "I suspect he was inevitably destined to become a novelist, not an entomologist—his biographer and the Revolution notwithstanding." I am not so sure. At least for a time, Nabokov dwelled and thrived on that "high ridge where the mountainside of scientific knowledge joins the opposite slope of artistic imagination," the habitat of *Erebia* and *Elphinstonia,* place of rarefied air, science, poetry, and sublime fiction. As Joann Karges writes, he blended "the science, art, and sport of Lepidoptera" and "the art and game of Literature" into "the ultimate spiral." Clearly, he cherished both, more than

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anything but his family—and perhaps the distant memory of Vyra, where the butterfly hunt had begun.

Although I failed to meet Nabokov in Montreux that distant spring ago, I am glad I went. As I later learned, the attempt was doomed from the start. Nabokov was very ill at the time, at a hospital down the lake in Lausanne. Yet it was not, after all, a case of nothing ventured, nothing gained. I ventured little, but I gained much, for there is something to be said for mere propinquity in a pilgrimage. Just being in the gravitational field of the admired figure, among the landscapes and buildings that he or she has known and loved, lends the seeker a sense of association that books and artifacts alone cannot provide. At this remove, writing about Nabokov, I feel that I know him better for having traveled to his final home.

Besides, in another sense, I have met the man many times. I have walked with him each time I've chased a Swallowtail in the shadow of Longs Peak, among Ponderosa Pines and Mariposa Lilies, or watched a Magdalena Alpine float down the stony slope of Mount Meeker. I have followed soft brown Satyrs with him under Gambel Oaks after a fragrant rain at the Black Canyon of the Gunnison. And when I tracked hulky butterflies in a hot Turkmenian canyon, erupting from the dusty road or vanishing onto tree bark, they were the same Great Banded Graylings that Nabokov stalked in the Crimea.

I encountered Nabokov in the Chiricahua Mountains of Arizona, above the spectacular orange rhyolite formations of Cave Creek Canyon, when I walked into the pines and found the butterfly known today as Nabokov's Satyr (he had gone there to challenge another worker's incorrect sinking of this butterfly into a species that Nabokov had earlier discovered at the Grand Canyon), and in Yankee Boy Basin in Colorado's San Juan Mountains, where I found Nabokov's Blue, a shred of the sky's thin air blowing across the alpine fellfields. Nabokov eventually discovered the first female of *Lycaeides idas sublivens* near here; it was the crowning achievement in his pursuit of these scintillated and lunuled Blues across the miles and the years.

Vladimir Nabokov knew what all lepists know: the rhapsodic thrall in which one may be held by butterflies and moths. Konstantin Godunov-Cherdyntsev knew it, and Ada Veen knew it too, though Lolita never quite got it. No simple whim, Nabokov's butterflies were the wings of a passion that many have known, but none have named as well as he: "a momentary vacuum into which rushes all that I love."

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India's American Imports

ADAM HOCHSCHILD

A few days after arriving in India for the first time, I went to see a big Hindi-language hit movie called *Dil To Pagal Hai,* or "The Heart Is Crazy." The film was showing in a small, desperately poor town in the northern state of Rajasthan. Outside the theater, people were arriving on foot, on bicycles, in pedicabs, on motor scooters carrying three or four men each, on packed carts drawn by camels or oxen with painted horns, and on wagons towed by farm tractors. In the theater's men's room, patrons far outnumbered urinals, and dozens of men were simply using the floor.

The film's plot was loosely borrowed from *A Chorus Line.* The director of a musical is torn between his old girlfriend and the star of his new show. Various subplots, dance numbers, and heavily laden glances fluff things out to several hours. In the end the director gets the new star, and the old girlfriend pairs up with the new star's old fiancé, so everyone lives happily ever after. But the curious thing about this film was that although it was made in India, and the producer, director, and actors were all Indian, and the audience and theater could not have been more Indian, there was, on the surface, little Indian about what was on the screen. The film showed virtually no Indian clothing, food, signs, furniture, or anything else.

There were no street scenes in India. There were, however, street scenes in the European Disneyland, and in London, where one of the male characters is making his fortune. When he thinks he has won his woman, he makes the victorious downward jerk of the clenched fist that

Adam Hochschild's most recent books are *Finding the Trapdoor* and *King Leopold's Ghost,* from which "The King's Lobbyists" was excerpted in the SCHOLAR (Summer 1998). From November 1997 until April 1998, Hochschild and his wife, Arlie, were Fulbright Lecturers in India, based in the southwestern state of Kerala.

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American pro athletes make after scoring a basket or touchdown. Interior shots showed a modern airport, film studios, a Japanese restaurant, and a luxurious hospital with private rooms. The musical numbers were American disco, not Indian. The stars used a conspicuously displayed variety of cell phones, beepers, and new cars. They sipped bottles of mineral water; wore blue jeans, leotards, and mini-skirts; and drank lots of Pepsi—the company must have paid heavy "product placement" fees. But the West itself, paying no fee, was the real product placement, from the California-sleek furnishings of the characters' homes to the distinctly un-Indian rolling green pastures of the hero's imagined dream landscape, through which the heroine runs in a gauzy white dress. So: an Indian film without India in it.

Except that India *was* in the story. The jilted woman, Girlfriend #1, curses the gods for setting her suitor on the wrong track. Girlfriend #2, who falls for the director, is escaping an arranged marriage. Plus, although the film was as chaste as could be (no nudity, barely even a kiss), the audience, except for our small, much-stared-at group of Indians and foreigners, was entirely male. Evidently local women don't come to the late show.

I began thinking about this curious blend of India and non-India as we left the theater and made our way through the camels and pedicabs and farm tractors, and the contradictions remained in the back of my mind for the rest of the five months my wife and I spent living in the country. You normally think of travel as a way of getting to know something unfamiliar. But travel anywhere for an American today involves getting to know not something totally unfamiliar but a combination, often an uneasy one, of the unfamiliar and the familiar.

For the Indians who watched this film, and the hundreds of others like it that their country produces each year, glamour lies in a dreamworld where everything is smooth and clean and electronic, where the artifacts that surround you are American or European. Objects of almost any kind are always advertised in ways that emphasize their foreignness. In the ads in India's slick newsweeklies promoting clothes, cars, cigarettes, computers, there are no dark-skinned models. Either by birth or by the retoucher's brush, the features of many Indian models are ethnically ambiguous—hair dark enough to be Indian, skin light enough to be European, eyes that might be either.

To a country like this, what gets imported is seldom America at its best: a commitment to human rights, American informality and skepticism toward authority, equality between men and women, a school system that values individual creativity more than rote learning. Instead, cultural imports are mainly those things that someone can make money selling. Ideas travel slowly. The desire for objects travels at the speed of a TV transmission.

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Through India's importation of such yearnings, the West, mostly the United States, has conquered the country far more conclusively than the British ever did. The British left some monuments and street names and, to the business and governing classes, the English language. But then they went home. The signs of earlier conquerors are even more transitory: I saw squatters living inside sepulchres in an old overgrown Dutch graveyard in the port city of Cochin. But the signs of the new conquest are everywhere—on billboards, on movie and TV screens, in the armloads of gadgets that Indians who live or work abroad bring when they come home. No guns or tanks or ships are strong enough to keep this conquest at bay, for it is a conquest not by the sword but by religion: the religion of consumption.

The new religion outdraws the old. The one other movie I saw in India was a James Bond film. The theater was huge, just across the street from a small Hindu shrine that had few visitors. I tried to watch the film through the eyes of the shrine keeper. The religion Bond represents provides tough competition. Bond braves, unscathed, some of the classic elements that impede mortal beings: air (he flies a jet fighter and does free-fall parachuting), water (he wears scuba equipment), and fire (through which he dashes unharmed while the villain's lair goes up in flames). The chariot of this new god is a remote-controlled BMW whose electrically charged door handles and other secret weaponry make it impervious to harm. Additional devices—which look like Western consumer products such as wristwatches or cell phones, but have other powers as well—serve Bond as amulets, with a supernatural destructive force as strong as any thunderbolt hurled by Shiva.

This is the shape of the new conquest. For any object to be certified as desirable to the Indian consumer, it must have a Western aura, even if it is Indian-made. For example, the house we rented came equipped with an electrically powered water purifier called an Aquaguard—something manufactured in India and sold by the millions. When running, the Aquaguard played synthesized electronic music to remind you it was on, so you wouldn't let the bottle it was filling overflow. And what music did it play, in ovenlike weather, only six hundred miles from the equator? Two tunes, over and over: "Jingle Bells" and "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town."

For a week, as part of our time as Fulbright lecturers in India, my wife and I are teaching at something called the American Studies Research Center (since then renamed the Indo-American Centre for International Studies), in Hyderabad. The Center gives courses of various sorts, but its heart is a library—a superb one. It contains the largest collection of books and periodicals about the United States to be found anywhere outside the U.S. and one library in Europe. A reader can feast on the complete works of hundreds of American authors and on back

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issues of more than seven hundred magazines and journals. From poetry to architecture to national parks, you could find enough material here to write a doctoral dissertation on innumerable aspects of American life, and hundreds of Indians have done so. The Center was founded some thirty-five years ago by the U. S. Information Agency; it is now scrambling for money elsewhere, because the end of the Cold War means no more government funds.

There is something unreal about this perfectly reproduced piece of an American university campus, complete with mowed and watered lawn, plunked down like a green, carefully manicured island in the middle of scorched India. Thousands of yards of shelves house such volumes as *The Papers of John Marshall* and *Interior Department Reports,* when, across the road, squatters are living in the bushes, and a few miles away in the heart of the huge city, tens of thousands of people are living under tarpaulins or sheets of plastic or no roof at all—on the sidewalk, in vacant lots, at construction sites, and beneath freeway overpasses.

I have a similar feeling of disjuncture when I lecture to the Indian college teachers at the Center's American civilization course. Few have been to the U.S. and almost all are eager to go. Many are leftists who believe—correctly, I think—that the way the U.S. is using the new global trade regime to reshape the world to its liking makes life harder for poor countries like India. But at the same time, America beckons: it is the source of travel grants, scholarships, cutting-edge culture. These teachers sit with us at meals and shyly launch conversations, usually on subjects about which I feel abysmally ignorant. "Can I talk with you about symbolism in John Barth and William Faulkner?" asks one. Another, from Nepal, speaks movingly about the burden of illiteracy and the oppression of women there, but as a scholar he is entranced by Thomas Pynchon.

Am I jealous that these people have been able to make more sense of Barth and Pynchon than I have? Probably. But why are they attracted to the most abstruse and difficult of American writers? Is it because these seem the highest peaks to scale in the American cultural landscape? Or is it because the complexity and sophistication of Barth and Pynchon are a substitute for the complex and sophisticated personal computers, video cameras, and other consumer goods that are beyond the financial reach of most Indian college teachers?

I'm left feeling that if there's anything useful being imported from the U.S. at this particular spot, it is neither our lectures, nor John Barth and Thomas Pynchon, nor the judicial opinions of John Marshall and the other contents of the library. Rather, it is the example of how the library itself is run. Unlike those in most other libraries in India, and, indeed, elsewhere in the world, the stacks are open to visitors. The catalogue is well organized and up-to-date, and it matches the books on the shelves. The shelved books are upright and in their proper places. There are no

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dusty, moldering piles that have been waiting to be reshelved for months. And, above all, the librarians—who are all Indians, incidentally—smile. They make eye contact. They offer to help you find what you're looking for. They don't treat library users as unwelcome, lower-ranking intruders. Indeed, when we meet Indian scholars who have been to Hyderabad to use this library, it is these things, not the actual books, that they marvel over. With reason: to my mind the user-friendly, open-stack American university library is one of the great cultural treasures on earth.

Was this the key part of American culture that Congress and the U.S.I.A. thought would be imported by India when they set up this place during the Cold War? I'm sure not, otherwise they wouldn't now cut off the money. They were doubtless thinking instead about the glories of free enterprise and the evils of Communism. A paradox of the strange business of cultural imports is that what gets imported may be quite different from what people think they are exporting.

One of the most pervasive of all cultural imports—something reinforced unconsciously by every minute spent looking at billboards advertising apartment buildings, at "Baywatch" or "NYPD Blue," at any newspaper photo that shows the West—is the idea of what constitutes a proper building. It is built of materials that are inflexible and permanent. They are usually costly and often brought long distances. These notions are American and European in origin, not Indian. Two-thirds of India's structures are still made of mud, and in some parts of the country the roofs are likely to be palm thatch. If you own even a small plot of land, both materials may be plentiful and free and close at hand.

In the South Indian state of Kerala, where we spend most of our five months, I visit a small settlement of "tribals," as they are called, members of one of the many indigenous groups that live close to the land throughout India. The people in this settlement are from the Kani tribe, and they live beneath a rocky mountain ridge in a bamboo forest, raising and eating fruits and vegetables. To reach them requires walking a mile and a half from the nearest dirt road, along a forest trail.

I'm being given a tour of this area by the president and several members of the *panchayat,* or city council, of the municipality that includes the bamboo forest. A hard-driving, energetic man, the president wants to show me the primitive conditions in which the tribals live, "so that you can really understand the need for changes." But the visit has the opposite effect on me.

At the settlement of a half-dozen homes, we go to the house of Mallan Kani, the chief. I am given sliced pineapple, and a coconut with a hole to drink from. Mallan Kani wears only a loincloth. The officials say he doesn't know his age, but they believe him to be between eighty and eighty-five. We find him with his two daughters and two daughters-in-law.

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A son arrives, returning from an expedition into the forest to gather firewood. Everyone is barefoot.

Almost everything that surrounds us is made of the versatile bamboo, from the thatch of the roof (which lasts three years), to the walls of split bamboo, to the woven mats that cover the dirt floor. On three sides, the house is open to the cooling breeze. The only furniture is a bamboo cot with another woven mat. More rolled mats are stored in a rack hanging from the ceiling, reached by a bamboo ladder. In the kitchen, bamboo racks of various shapes hold tin pots and plates and spoons. One of the chief's daughters demonstrates a bamboo bow used to shoot not arrows but small stones—to force away bothersome wild elephants. Even the settlement's chicken house is made of bamboo, as are a trap for catching fish from a nearby stream, and a rat trap, whose spring mechanism utilizes the tension of a bent piece of the wood.

All this bamboo has been cut within a few minutes' walk. Gathering it cost no money, depleted no limited resource, required no fossil fuel energy, added nothing to global warming. To look at a house where everything has been so ingeniously made of one material takes my breath away. It is like looking at a visual piece of music: bamboo theme with variations. I am awed by the beauty. One of the local officials with me seems to have an unexpected twinge of the same feeling, and says, "It's a pity we have to change all this."

Under a new development plan, the *panchayat* president explains to me proudly, they are building houses for these people—solid, durable houses of concrete, with tin roofs. It begins to dawn on me that his zeal to modernize these tribals is related to the way Indians have come to feel tribal in comparison with the West.

Interestingly, however, one of the Kani tells my interpreter that many of them don't *want* the new houses the *panchayat* is so eager to build for them. Even in daytime, it will be dark inside, and under the equatorial sun the tin roofs will get broiling hot. If the *panchayat* insists on building the concrete houses, the Kani will use them to store farm tools, he says, and they'll keep on living in the bamboo houses. But the next generation, will they continue? I doubt it. By then the imported idea of what a house is supposed to be made of will be irrevocably in place.

One of the things I am supposed to do in India is give two- and three-day workshops in nonfiction writing for students and working journalists. I do this in four different cities. What am I importing? It is not anything uniquely American about writing techniques. The best students know what I mean when I talk about narrative strategy. And some of the published examples of good writing that I've picked for us to discuss are Indian. I think what I'm importing most effectively are some strong beliefs about chairs. Each time I arrive at a university for one of

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these workshops, the chair I'm supposed to sit in is on a platform, behind a table or podium, and everyone else's chairs are lined up in rows facing me. Often the men are sitting on one side of the room, the women on the other. Each time, I enlist the puzzled class in rearranging the chairs in a circle. I have noticed the same kind of thing in classrooms in Africa. The legacy of colonialism lives on in a curiously ossified form. And thus school classrooms in Africa or Asia are not like the British or French classrooms of today, which are sometimes as informal and non-hierarchical as American ones. Rather, they are like the British or French classrooms of sixty years ago, or the British or French classrooms of someone's imagination. Rearranging the chairs helps, but it is still like swimming in molasses to get a discussion going, to get anyone to speak up or to argue with someone else—especially me. In one workshop it is Day Two before a student finally says, "I think I disagree with your point about . . . " I let go an inner sigh of relief. The right to dispute the teacher: one American import I wholeheartedly like.

Something else American visitors import to India is their own expectations. You expect the unfamiliar, and you certainly find it. What strikes me, though, is not the occasional elephant in the street, or the temples and palaces, or the processions of brilliantly costumed people on a Hindu holy day. These I'm prepared for; they are the unfamiliar made familiar by postcards. More startling and intriguing are the many ways in which all kinds of things that in Western society are usually more hidden suddenly become visible.

The vast yard where old cars are carefully taken apart—hubcaps in one pile, steering wheels in another, axles in another, and so on, right next to a big complex of butcher stalls where taken-apart animals are similarly displayed. The gigantic switch with a six-inch handle, such as one imagines the on-off switch in a nuclear power plant to have, that controls the electrical line entering the mural-sized fuse box that takes up at least fifteen square feet of prominent wall space in our home. Our backyard pit for burning garbage. The vacant lot next door where our neighborhood's unburnable garbage ends up. The fact that, yes, our rented house has a gas-burning stove as advertised, but we ourselves have to go to the gas dealer's office (where the manager's desk has an offering to the gods on a banana leaf) and collect the gas—contained in metal tanks that clank and rattle together ominously beneath our seat in a rickety three-wheeler auto-rickshaw on the way home. The way social ranks are laid bare: a person's degrees and the universities they are from, his profession and title are all displayed on the nameplate in front of his house and, in the case of a government official, on a little red sign on his car: VICE CHANCELLOR, KERALA UNIVERSITY.

Living in India also lays bare the material expectations we export. I

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may think of myself as nonmaterialistic and deplore the Indian attachment to Western consumer goods, but I'm forced to realize that I take all too many of them for granted myself. Our standard of living in India is far higher than that of most people around us. We tell house rental agents that we're just looking for something simple. But simplicity is relative. For we expect what Americans think of as basic requirements: electricity, a telephone, e-mail, flush toilet, hot and cold water.

We are assured that all these things will be available. And after a fashion they are. But it takes five weeks for the telephone to be installed, sometimes it goes dead, and we can't use it to call abroad. There is hot water, but not in the kitchen. The electricity goes out for half an hour every evening, and sometimes for longer stretches during the day. The voltage is high enough to work the e-mail modem only before 9:00 A.M. The municipal water supply shrinks to a trickle in the dry season, and sometimes the pump to our backup well fails. When there's water, the toilet flushes, but you can hear it gurgling into the backyard septic tank (which is, strangely, uphill from the well). So: all of these basic things exist, but most of them come and go unpredictably.

This is a healthy lesson. For one thing, it connects us with others. If one or another of these services isn't working, we share with neighbors, or do without for a few hours, or for a day or two. They take buckets of our water if they have none; they bring us candles if we have no electricity. At first I am frustrated when something breaks down—and my impatience makes me feel embarrassingly American, since a few houses away there are people who live by kerosene light and get water from a public faucet down the road. What right do I have to complain? Yet complain I do. Eventually, I come to be more relaxed. To learn that we can survive temporarily without phone or water, or whatever, makes us feel a little more hardy and self-reliant. But that's only because we're doing without things to which we secretly feel entitled. And I'm much more American than I'd like to be in that sense of consumer entitlement. I could do without hot water for a long time when it's 100 degrees in the shade, but without e-mail?

The U.S. ambassador's house in New Delhi must be one of the most palatial embassy residences anywhere in the world. The visitor crosses a large courtyard, passes through a hotel-sized, two-story-high lobby—its side tables dotted with framed photographs of the ambassador with his children, with Bill Clinton, with various other luminaries—and then passes outdoors again, down some steps onto a wide lawn. This pleasantly warm evening the lawn is filled with tables covered by white cloths, at which are sitting more than a hundred guests: high Indian government officials, members of the diplomatic corps (the Swiss ambassador's chauffeur is a red-turbaned Sikh with white Swiss crosses on his

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red shoulder tabs), visiting Americans, U.S. embassy officials. White-jacketed waiters serve drinks. As we come in, we see on a raised stage at the back of the lawn, his long hair now gray, the folksinger Arlo Guthrie. He is in the middle of his famous eighteen-minute anthem of protest from the 1960s, "Alice's Restaurant."

> You can get anything you want
> at Alice's Restaurant . . .

The slurred words of the song, full of allusions to draft physicals and the like, are hard enough to follow even for someone who has heard them before and who lived in that place and time. As they listen and then applaud politely, what are these Indians in kurtas and saris making of all this? And what piece of America is being imported here?

When the song is over, the guests head for the buffet tables at the side of the lawn. Some of the younger Americans from the embassy, who look as if they weren't even born in the 1960s, climb up on stage to shake Guthrie's hand and get his autograph. The ambassador, former Ohio governor Richard Celeste, who has invited Guthrie to India, watches approvingly. "Look," he says quietly, pointing at the backs of the crew-cut heads of several Americans clustered around the singer. "Some of the security guys from the embassy. The wounds of that time are really healed now."

Perhaps. But I think what was happening was something else. What was really being imported was the example not of how to heal wounds but of how the passage of time can turn the relics of absolutely anything—even the anti-war movement, many of whose members went into exile or to jail—into a mere cultural ornament, a catchy tune to be cheerfully consumed along with good food and drink on a balmy evening. Sadly, this was a lesson, it turned out, that India already knew. For this evening was in April 1998, and less than six weeks later, with the foreknowledge of some of the men who sat on the lawn, listening to Arlo Guthrie, the country that had just spent many months elaborately commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Mohandas Gandhi, the greatest teacher of nonviolence in modern times, set off five nuclear explosions. Hypocrisy by those in power is too plentiful everywhere to require any American imports.

Among the strongest American expectations imported to a place like India are fears. At the beginning I am afraid of getting sick, of being taken advantage of, of being robbed. We bring lots of medicines and vitamin pills; I examine all food suspiciously for signs of germs or spoilage. I fear being taken for a naïve tourist by shopkeepers. And it seems that people here are also afraid of robbery: windows throughout India

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are covered with bars, often even on the upper floors of apartment houses. Thieves must be resourceful, I think, climbing up from below or rappelling down from the roof.

However, we don't get sick. The first time I buy food at a neighborhood fruit and vegetable stall, its keeper comes racing after me from 100 yards away, with my change—because I had misunderstood him and left 50 rupees (about $1.25) on the counter instead of 15 rupees. And after a month or two, it dawns on me that the window bars everywhere are not against thieves but against India's vast population of aggressive, hungry crows, whose taste for human food scraps has been honed feasting on the omnipresent roadside garbage. It takes a few weeks more before I realize that virtually nobody in our part of India worries about street crime. The rare policemen I see are unarmed. Why does it take me so long to let go of my fears? What's most foreign, most unknown, is what we're most afraid of, even when we seek it out. Maybe that's why we seek it out.

I can date the moment I let these fears go. It is about eight o'clock one evening and I'm making my way home from a workshop for local government officials in a distant, unfamiliar part of Trivandrum, Kerala's capital. The isolated building is on top of a big hill. There are no taxis outside, no buses. The nearest place I have any chance of finding an auto-rickshaw is a mile or so away, a traffic circle at the bottom of the hill. I head off down the road. There is no moon, and everything is pitch black. There are no streetlights. Either the electricity is having its nightly shutdown, or else the houses in this neighborhood don't have any. Occasionally a far-off kerosene lamp flickers faintly. Occasionally a pair of very dim headlights zooms up or down the road, and I step quickly aside, but not too far, for fear of unseen ditches. I'm wearing dark clothes; the drivers of passing vehicles can't see me. I should have brought a flashlight, worn a white shirt. I should have one of those red reflective safety vests. Dumb. In vain, I anxiously try to flag down what may or may not be a passing taxi that looms suddenly out of the darkness and then disappears. The driver can't see the furled black umbrella I'm waving. The only way I can tell I'm on or off the road is by the feel of the asphalt underfoot.

Partway down the hill, I become aware of the rattle of metal wheels ahead of me on the road, accompanied by another rhythmic clinking. Finally I'm close enough to make out, just barely, the outline of a food vendor's cart. The man pushing it, judging from the sound, is continually stirring something—I can't see what—in a frying pan or wok. But on the front of the cart, his protection against being run over, is a candle. That's all it takes. I realize that the candle can be my protection, too. Flooded with a sudden sense of safety, I follow twenty paces behind this mysterious, candlelit stir-frying for the rest of the way down the hill.

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Acupuncture and Science

SHERWIN B. NULAND

When last heard from, "The Uncertain Art" had just wandered into a whereabout far beyond even the vaguely defined boundaries within which it usually makes its way. The subject of the most recent column was acupuncture—acupuncture, in fact, as a replacement for general anesthesia. That I as a scientifically trained physician should not only consider such an outlandish possibility but embrace it with wondrous enthusiasm must, in the opinion of some, appear to be a wildly erratic departure from the clinical judgment I claim to value so highly. And yet, I had seen the method succeed not once but twice. Moreover, reliable medical observers have reported its usefulness in many additional cases. Having witnessed two thyroid operations in which acupuncture successfully substituted for surgical sleep, I joined the ranks of the convinced. Though I was certainly *not* convinced of the role said to be played by the mysterious energy called *chi* or of the existence of the channels along which it is said to flow, I had become absolutely sure that the technique was as advertised: it is possible to carry out some major surgical procedures this way.

But there remained the how and the why. I turned first to my surgical colleague, Yan Zhangshou, a man reared in the old traditions but trained in the ways of Western science. I am always very careful during conversations in which Chinese therapies are discussed in scientific terms. I'm not sure that such discussions have much validity. Western researchers simply assume that every observable phenomenon must have a straightforward explanation, which they can discover by applying the methods of their kind of science. If no explanation is forthcoming, the scientifically trained mind will usually do one of two things with the mysterious phenomenon.

The more frequent response is to categorize it as an elaborate, even if not a willful, hoax. Explanations of this sort, which lean heavily on the jargon of the social scientist and the psychologist, are awash with terms like "autosuggestion," "anecdotal evidence," "cultural expectation," "indoctrination," "selection process," and "uncontrolled." When the mystery involves sickness, the well-worn "placebo effect" is often invoked. Many of the Western explainings-away of acupuncture's success, whether in its medical or its surgical uses, have been written in this kind of language, which effectively begs the question, as do terms like the ubiquitous "psychophysiological." Invoking such hypotheses without any evidence except the *lack* of evidence of something more specific is no elucidation at all, especially when it is produced by the very form of Western reasoning that is supposed to abjure fuzzy thinking.

The second approach is the opposite of the first. In the face of personal observation that cannot be doubted, many a seeker after rational ways of explaining the as-yet-unexplainable will try to squeeze acupuncture into one of the pigeonholes of orthodox biomedical science. This approach has been theoretical or experimental, or sometimes both. The theoreticians base their thinking on a concept called the gate theory, which is that the electricity or the vast number of tiny pain stimuli from the needles so overloads the capacity of the nervous system that the larger bulk of pain produced by the surgery cannot get to the brain, and therefore never enters the patient's awareness. The laboratory scientists have another idea, and they have produced a host of experimental clues to support it. Chinese, and some

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Western, researchers have found evidence that the stimulation of acupuncture needles often causes the brain to release narcotic-like substances called endorphins. It is quite possible that starting up the acupuncture current has much the same effect as starting up an intravenous drip of a powerful drug that acts like morphine.

Even now, I have no idea what Yan Zhangshou thinks about all of this, although I have asked him. He was raised in the certainty of the Middle Kingdom's superior wisdom, and yet everywhere around him he sees the urgent demands of the modern science he has been taught. When he speaks to Westerners—and I am no exception—he seems obliged to show that he thinks about human biology the way we do, because that is the progressive thing. And yet, what has he done with the culture he has inherited? Who is he when he is at home?

I like the answer Dr. Yan gave me after a long discussion of placebos, the gate theory, and endorphins, because it seems to me that it exemplifies his faith in the possibility that Western science, with its need to believe that it can answer all kinds of eternal questions, may be barking up the wrong tree. Dr. Yan's answer was a single sentence, deceptively simple. But it managed to communicate his underlying allegiance to the principles of Chinese medicine, his awe of the mysteries of nature, and his willingness to believe that understanding will come. He said, "We don't really know *yet* the natural basis of the channels."

Chinese physicians, despite their upbringing in the old ways, have not been content with explanations based on *chi* and channels. At the Shanghai Medical University, I visited a research team seeking the scientific basis of acupuncture. My host was the university's president, Dr. Tang Zhaoyou. Dr. Tang is a man of my own age who was for much of his career one of the world's authorities on the diagnosis and treatment of primary liver cancer. His research and surgical contributions are widely known, and his credentials as a clinical scientist are impeccable.

When we discussed my impressions of the thyroid surgery I had seen in Changsha and Beijing, Dr. Tang told me of his personal experience as a patient. This was my first opportunity to speak at length with someone who had actually undergone surgery with acupuncture. Even had my own observations left me with significant doubts, any residual skepticism would have been erased by this account, which came, after all, from the director of one of China's leading institutions of Western-style medicine.

"I had thyroidectomy twice under acupuncture," Dr. Tang told me. "The first time was in the early 1970s, and it was for benign thyroid tumors. The Cultural Revolution was going on, and things were not so sure. I was a little worried that my recurrent laryngeal nerves might be cut, so I decided that I wanted to talk during the operation, to be safe." (The recurrent laryngeal nerves lie alongside the trachea on each side of the neck, and they supply the muscles that move the vocal cords. Because they are situated directly behind the thyroid lobes, they are vulnerable to surgical injury, which inevitably results in permanent hoarseness.) "So I asked for acupuncture, and it went very well. When the condition came back after seventeen years, I needed a total thyroidectomy, to remove all of the remaining gland. I had liked acupuncture so much the first time that I had it again. And again, it was fine."

I asked whether he had been given any supplemental sedation. "Only a very small dose of Valium before they started," he replied. "And that second operation lasted four hours."

What did it feel like?

"Well, you know, it's not like complete anesthesia, so I did feel them working—and I could feel touching and pressure. But I had no pain. My real problem was the position. For four hours I had to lie there with my head arched back. That part of it was unpleasant, and made it difficult to swallow my saliva. But otherwise it was good."

What I had heard was a testimonial from a satisfied customer. What impressed me most about the description was the matter-of-fact way in which it was given, as though to say, "Well, of course it was good. What else would you expect?"

Dr. Tang arranged for me to meet Cao Xiaoding, the director of Shanghai Medical University's Acupuncture Anesthesia and Analgesia Research Coordinating Group, who, in

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addition to her Chinese medical degree, has a doctorate in neurobiology from the Academy of Medical Sciences in St. Petersburg. Dr. Cao filled her conversation with talk of experimental protocols, laboratory technology, statistical analysis, and the most fundamental forms of research in neurobiology. In the two hours we spent together, she revealed herself to be a combination of patient pedagogue and incomprehensible fount of abstruse neurophysiological esoterica. I was unprepared to deal with the ultra-sophisticated fruits of her high-powered research team, which consisted of thirty faculty members and six coordinated laboratories of neurophysiology, neuropharmacology, neuromorphology, neurobiochemistry, clinical physiology, and computer science. During an hour of describing experimental studies, Dr. Cao peppered her disquisition increasingly with terms that were only vaguely, if at all, familiar to me, like "microiontophoretic," "dorsal horn enkephalins," "ventrolateral funiculus," and "radioenzymatic assay." Fortunately, as I was leaving, she gave me a gift of journal articles published in English by members of her team, so I was able later to review the vastness of their output while sitting quietly at home surrounded by textbooks and reference materials. What I learned can be summarized in a few paragraphs.

In 1964, the Shanghai researchers began to develop methods to determine the threshold beyond which pain is felt and the threshold at which it can no longer be tolerated. While studying patients who were undergoing traditional Chinese acupuncture for chronic pain, they and other researchers discovered in the blood an elevation of narcotic-like substances, the so-called endogenous opioid peptides, or endorphins. Later, they were able to demonstrate in animals and in human subjects that these acupuncture-induced endorphins are produced in specific sites in the brain called the caudate nucleus and the periaqueductal gray matter, or PAG. Stimuli applied to those areas increase the amount of endorphin production and also enhance the analgesic, or pain-lessening, effect of acupuncture. Moreover, some American researchers have established that the periaqueductal gray matter contains a relatively high concentration of complex molecular structures called opiate receptors. This means that certain parts of the PAG are the critical sites on which narcotic analgesia has its effect, and those parts are extremely close to the very cells that produce it. Not surprisingly, when the PAG or the caudate nucleus of experimental animals is damaged, the effectiveness of acupuncture is lessened. During the application of traditional acupuncture, the activity of the two brain centers is increased, and they produce more endorphins. It has been shown that the effect of the increased endorphins, and therefore the effectiveness of the acupuncture, can be partly blocked by the use of nalaxone, a narcotic antagonist. This is supporting evidence that the active agent in acupuncture is indeed the endorphin.

The basic principle described in the Cao group's publications is the same one that has been identified by research teams working in laboratories in America, in Europe, and in other centers in China: acupuncture functions to raise the threshold of tolerance of pain because it activates the body's inherent system of protection. The diminution in pain awareness involves the integrated action of several levels of the nervous system, but the most important factor so far identified seems to be the increased production of endorphins. Of course, the basic question remains: How do the acupuncture needles activate the process in the first place? Dr. Cao's group believes that stimulating the needles sends signals that are picked up by sensory nerves in the area and carried to specific pathways in the spinal cord, which pass them upward to appropriate areas of the brain.

All this provides a reasonable explanation for the effectiveness of surgical acupuncture. But "reasonable" does not mean "proven" or even well enough documented to satisfy the rigorous criteria of experimental science. Although there is strong support for Dr. Cao's theories, not all laboratories have been able to replicate her findings, and some legitimate questions have been raised about the experimental methods that were used in her research.

Objections like these, however, often arise during the process of validating experimental studies and the theories that develop from them. They are part of the sequence of any

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scientific inquiry. Whatever the eventual outcome of acupuncture research, the research itself is certain to increase knowledge about the mechanisms of pain and the body's tolerance of it.

There are those Westerners who have wondered why it is necessary to await experimental validation before using a technique that has been shown to work in practice. Among them was James Reston, one of America's most respected journalists. During his 1971 visit to the People's Republic of China, Reston underwent an appendectomy under spinal anesthesia at the hospital of the Peking Union Medical College. (At that time it had been renamed the Anti-Imperialist Medical College, as though in flaunting rejection of its founder, that symbol of American hegemony, the Rockefeller Foundation. When Reston was admitted to the hospital building in which members of the Western diplomatic corps were treated, he saw a large sign just to the right of the entrance, bearing a quotation from Chairman Mao: "The time will not be far off when all the aggressors and their running dogs in the world will be buried. There is certainly no escape for them.")

Much impressed with the acupuncture used to treat his postoperative pain, Reston wanted to learn more. He was taken to operating rooms in a Shanghai hospital where he saw two wide-awake patients undergoing brain surgery with acupuncture. He also saw an alert young man conversing and even eating a piece of fruit while surgeons removed a tuberculous lung through a "vast gaping hole in his back." Of the Chinese surgeons, he wrote, "While they cannot agree on the theory of how needle anesthesia works, they are increasingly convinced that it does work, and they are operating on the pragmatic evidence and not waiting for theoretical justifications. . . . There is enough objective evidence of practical medical information in the use of acupuncture to justify exploration by somebody more scientific than newspaper reporters."

While surgical acupuncture is not being used in the West, many thousands of Americans, perhaps millions, have been treated with its needles for less acute situations, such as chronic pain. One of my colleagues, Dr. Sung Liao, is an expert in this form of therapy. I first met Dr. Liao in 1961. Although our paths have crossed only occasionally during these almost forty years, it has not been difficult to follow his busy career. A graduate of the Hunan Medical University, he trained in the specialty of rehabilitation medicine at the Massachusetts General Hospital and did further study at St. Thomas's Hospital in London. By the time I met him, he had founded departments in his specialty in several Connecticut hospitals and was serving as chairman of three of them simultaneously. Until he retired about ten years ago, he held the title of Clinical Professor of Surgery at the New York University College of Medicine.

While studying in London, Sung Liao had met Felix Mann, one of England's early proponents of acupuncture, a technique of which Dr. Liao had always been skeptical. "When I was studying at the Hunan Medical University in the nineteen-forties, everything was very scientific," he told me. "We looked down on acupuncture. It was done in the streets." But during the summer of 1971, Dr. Liao suffered the acute onset of rotator cuff syndrome, for which all attempts at nonsurgical therapy failed. In desperation, he sought out Mann, who was at the time lecturing at the Downstate branch of the medical school of the State University of New York. When the condition responded to Mann's acupuncture treatment, he brought together a group of ten physicians to take a course under the master. Gradually, Dr. Liao began to incorporate the technique into the therapy of people who came to him for treatment of a variety of conditions whose major symptom was pain. He was soon flooded with patients. "When I was at my peak," he told me, "I saw about sixty patients a day. Until 1984, I worked six days a week, usually until ten o'clock at night, and then I gradually cut down to a few hours on two days a week."

Sung Liao estimates that by the time of his retirement he had treated some twenty-five thousand people, with a success rate of about 85 percent, by which he meant no recurrence of pain.

Because doctors, like everyone else, are prone to remember their triumphs more accurately than their defeats, I sought out a disinterested evaluation of Dr. Liao's results. In

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1977, Marsha Greenfield, a graduate student at the Yale School of Epidemiology and Public Health, did the research for her master's thesis at Dr. Liao's clinic; her dissertation was titled "Acupuncture as a Rehabilitation Modality in Chronic Low Back Pain Syndrome." Chronic low back pain is a notoriously difficult problem to treat, one that often defies the best efforts of internists, orthopedists, neurosurgeons, and specialists in rehabilitation medicine. Although the underlying pathologies run a wide gamut, all types of low back pain are often lumped together by physicians and patients alike. People whose pain is resistant to treatment commonly go from one doctor to another until, in desperation, they turn to nonstandard therapies. Many of Dr. Liao's patients had come to him after having undergone manipulation, injection, and even surgery.

Marsha Greenfield studied 220 patients who were treated for low back pain between August 1975 and July 1976. She established specific criteria for improvement and adhered to strict statistical methods in analyzing the results. She found that three-quarters of the patients could be considered to have had a remarkably good response. What makes this figure even more impressive is that so many of them had histories of therapeutic failure.

Sung Liao is convinced that there are no psychological or personality characteristics that distinguish people who respond to acupuncture from those who do not. He is also convinced—and here he is supported by studies done by others—that there is no relationship between a patient's hypnotizability and the likelihood of response to acupuncture. But like everyone else, he has only theories about why it succeeds so often in chronic cases. Endorphins seem not to play a role, since they have been shown to be elevated only while the needles are in place. Others have disagreed, claiming that breaking the cycle of pain in this way may be the key to its eradication. Still others believe that increased levels of steroids or some other biochemically active substance are the cause, but there is very little reliable evidence to support such speculations.

The fact is that the basis of acupuncture's practical usefulness, even in the operating room, has still not been explained in terms acceptable to most orthodox Western scientists using orthodox Western investigative methods. In 1962, Aldous Huxley wrote, in an introduction to Felix Mann's first book, "From telepathy to acupuncture, queer facts get ignored by the very people whose business it is to investigate them—get ignored because they fail to fit into any of the academic pigeonholes and do not suffer themselves to be explained in terms of accredited theories."

But there are philosophers of science and medicine who tell us that we are on the threshold of a new way of looking at and interpreting the observations we make of the processes of disease and health. The effectiveness of correctly applied acupuncture is not our only evidence that there are undeniable phenomena that cannot—at least not yet, as Yan Zhangshou would put it—be explained by the investigational methods of today's biomedical science. Other functions may be involved, and perhaps philosophies may be required other than those that have been so successful since the scientific method became a major current of Western thought. Maybe the new perspectives will have room for such concepts as yin, yang, *chi*, and channels. Maybe they will not. Either way, I find myself agreeing with James Reston: we should get on with it.

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JOURNAL

A Bookman's Year

ROGER JONES

For anyone who likes books and can at least tolerate people, the bookselling business cannot be beaten. Each day is an adventure; as in libraries, one never knows what the next approach will bring, what inquiry or request will be forthcoming; not to mention the constant excitement of receiving new books. In such an unpredictable environment, everything one knows, all one's experience, is grist for the mill. And one becomes adept at bluffing one's way through situations that are outside one's knowledge and experience—after all, one cannot be expected to have read every book in the shop, though that is what customers often presume.

After almost fifteen years in the business, I decided to keep a journal of my bookish activities over a year's time, if only to provide something that might amuse me in my dotage. Here are some excerpts.

New Year's Day. Drove up to Hassop in Derbyshire to visit the Country Bookstore and make a selection of Bargain Books. I discovered this treasure trove of cheapies a few years ago; it has proved a reliable source of stock for the post-Christmas and Summer Book Sales. The store is housed in a former railway station. The stock is a mixture of genuine publishers' remainders (generally the most interesting items), cheap editions, and American imports. It is rather depressing to see so many fine books being sold off at knock-down prices (though some should never have been published in the first place and well deserve such a fate); on the other hand, one cannot suppress mounting excitement at discovering so many genuine bargains, including some volumes one has never before clapped eyes on.

Spotted many titles from the Newbury-based publisher Countryside Books on the shelves, including my own *Wiltshire Rambles*—the 1992 (fifth) printing reduced from £3.95 to £1.99. Ah! The ignominy of being remaindered!

6 January. Back in the shop after a five-day absence, and there is a great wodge of mail to open. One never knows what the post will bring, and that is one of the myriad pleasures of being a small publisher. One letter, without a "Dear Sir," reads as follows:

> I have been given 4 of your publications as a Christmas present—3 of which I found most enjoyable—the 4th I have just put into the dust-bin—a place I consider far too good for it—title *Belt & Buckle*—a most foul and positively nauciating [*sic*] load of bilge. What a waste of print and paper and other people's money. Surely you can't be proud of such a book. I trust you will pass on to the disgusting author my opinion of his filth.

What a tirade!! It took me a moment or two to draw breath and acknowledge that this was, indeed, a serious letter. When I first read *Belt & Buckle*—a childhood autobiography set in the 1950s—in manuscript form, I thought it was immensely funny. The humour is crude in parts, maybe; there is absolutely nothing pornographic, but a vein of humour very much in the English tradition epitomised by George Formby and rude seaside postcards—what I referred to in the back cover blurb as the author's "unabashed earthiness, akin to Chaucer." I cannot help feeling proud, not only of *Belt & Buckle*, but of the fact that one reader has been suffi-

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ciently moved to send me such a strongly worded letter.

18 January. Went to look at some second-hand books. An old lady, grandmother of the person who contacted me, is moving out of her flat in town to live with her daughter in Wales. It is always interesting to go through other people's book collections, especially when they've died or have decided to move into an old people's home or whatever. Then it is more likely one will see the interesting stuff and not just the items considered expendable. It is fascinating, too, how a collection of books reflects the preoccupations and personality of the owner, and how, quite often, whole areas of human experience are missing from an individual's bookshelf. This collection contained no books of a religious nature (even though the owner's flat is cheek by jowl with Bradford on Avon's Strict Baptist Chapel), not even a Bible, except a large tome bound in black cloth entitled *The Sacred Fire: The Story of Sex in Religion,* by B. Z. Goldberg, 1931. There was further evidence of an interest in sex. *The Seducer's Cookbook* combined this interest with the subject upon which the largest number of volumes focused: food and drink. There were umpteen books with such titles as *The Gourmet Companion, Eating and Drinking, My Life with Wine, We Shall Eat and Drink Again,* etc., etc. I'm not usually keen on buying a lot of second-hand cookery books, but these were a cut above the usual.

The only books which might be classified as natural history were a few doggy titles. Indeed, the one book I could have sold ten times over within a week was *Year of the Map: Portrait of a Wiltshire Town in 1841* (Bradford on Avon), which, calamitously, had its front cover well chewed by canine teeth, so unsellable.

1 February. Took a carload of stock to Westcountry Books in Tiverton and carried on down to Newton Abbot to sort out the sale or return stock of *Rambles Around Newton Abbot,* which I left there on publication two years ago. It hasn't sold as well as I'd anticipated and I took back 180 of the 300 copies I left then. Such is a publisher's life, full of downs and ups!

Newton Abbot is where I was Divisional Librarian, prior to coming to Bradford on Avon. It was in 1979 that I self-published my book on the story of the town, entitled *A Book of Newton Abbot.* That was a real "up"—I was on the greatest ego trip of my life and sold the initial print run of 1,000 in six weeks. That incomparable experience turned me into a publishing junkie. Ever since 1979 I have been dealing directly with W. H. Smith in Newton Abbot, and with the same book buyer. It is sad to end this longstanding relationship, but I have agreed to hand over all accounts in the southwest to my new distributor, Westcountry Books.

12 February. A pretty awful week in the shop except for today, thank Heavens. I suppose February is about the worst month of the year. Bought a lot more second-hand stock this week—I don't think we've ever had so many used books; I don't have sufficient shelf space to house them all. One customer remarked today that he did not like to see second-hand books too well ordered, that a certain disarray is really quite appealing.

Sent off draft for *Lumber Jill* to Mavis Danks, the author. It has made up to a satisfying 96-pager; with a two-color cover it should be a presentable little book at £3.95.

27 February. My God, but it's quiet, and a Saturday, too! It makes one rather frustrated to sit in this brightly lit emporium, surrounded by such literary wealth, and be all but ignored by the few people who scuttle past. I suppose this is the fag-end of the retailing year, midway between the January Sale and Easter, a time few publishers choose to launch choice new titles. We will survive to see a better day.

17 March. Called in at Shires Press in Trowbridge to collect samples of this half year's remaining covers: *Life on Sark* and *The Romany Way,* and was rather alarmed at the shocking pink ground color I chose for the latter. To describe it as overwhelming would be putting it mildly. Have moment of panic and contemplate scrapping the lot and starting again. However, once home, I asked twelve-year-old daughter Susie what she thinks of it: she likes it unreservedly, and that encourages me.

23 March. It is only a week since we began selling the Naxos range of classical recordings on compact disk, and the sales, though not

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spectacular, have been encouraging. Last week, too, I purchased a CD player so that now we have music in-store to create the right atmosphere. But do strains of Mozart and Vivaldi encourage or discourage book browsers?

20 April. Collected finished copies of *Lumber Jill* from the printers yesterday, and the book looks very good, though Cromwell Press managed to waste several hundred copies of the cover, which means I have only 1,600 copies instead of the planned 2,000. They offered to pay for reprinting 400 covers, but I think I will leave it as it is for the time being and hope that the whole book will be reprinted in the future.

30 April. To Cornwall for launch of *Lumber Jill* at Flambards on Monday, one or two meetings with authors, and a dollop of relaxation with Hazel and Susie. Carry on through Cornwall to Zennor, in the magical Penwith Peninsula, and locate Tregaraint House, home of the publisher John T. Wilson and his wife, Sue. Times are hard and the Wilsons offer B&B in their charming old stone house. Our room is lovely: old wooden furniture set against walls alternately rough-plastered and bare granite.

We walked into the village, had a drink in the Tinners Arms (where D. H. Lawrence once stayed) and set out, under the evening's setting sun, southwestwards along the coast path towards Gurnard's Head. The peace and solitude were palpable: the constant rush of the sea below, the trickling streams descending to meet the ocean, the endless array of wildflowers—bluebells, purple orchids, pink thrift, white stinking onions, red campion, and delicate, pale yellow primroses (especially primroses, they were everywhere and seemed too pretty and craftily arranged to be simply wildflowers). I was thrilled to come upon a sturdy wooden bench inscribed in memory of "Denys Val Baker, 1917–1984, Author, Editor, Seafarer," beside the path. It seemed a good omen: tomorrow I will be meeting Denys's son, Martin, together with Tim Scott, author of the book on Denys which we plan to publish in July.

12 May. Awoken by the telephone at 7:30 A.M.—it's the Police, the central pane of glass in the shop door has been smashed. Get dressed double-quick and arrive at the shop to be greeted by the local bobby standing to attention at the front door, ankle-deep in shattered glass. Open up to find, at a glance, desk drawers opened, the light on in the passage but nothing missing and the safe still intact. Then I look up and notice that the CD player has gone—this was in full view from outside the shop and was no doubt the thief's target. As I begin to clear up the broken glass I find a large chunk of Jurassic limestone which presumably was used to smash the glass. I suppose it could have been worse, but it's all a bit depressing—the third robbery we have suffered already this year!

22 May. To Prior Park School, where the local Antidote Theatre, set up by, among others, Carolyn Maynard (Miles Kington is her husband), is staging an "Any Questions" with a panel made up of the Theatre's patrons: Miles Kington (natch), Bel Mooney, Deborah Moggach, and John Mortimer, with question-master Carole Stone.

I laid out books by panel members and set up the till on some tables in a room where people assembled before filing into the theatre. First of the literary luminaries to arrive was Bel Mooney, fresh from the direct action to halt construction of the Batheaston bypass, having ended her hunger strike, as she informed all and sundry, and now "gasping for a drink and a fag." Then John Mortimer shambled in. He is quite a large man, especially around the middle, and wore a suit that looked as though he'd slept in it the night before, a pink tie with white spots, and old brown shoes. I was introduced and we shook hands—we had a good display of his books, including three early novels, recently reprinted by Penguin. Deborah Moggach—tall, hirsute, and smoking roll-ups—I also recognized.

Books were leaving my display like ham sandwiches at a bar mitzvah. Then Miles Kington, my first customer, bought a couple of J. Mortimer's books of interviews—good old Miles! I sold slightly more books (possibly into double figures) after the event, even though most people headed directly to the car park. Miles invited me back to his house in Limpley Stoke for a drink; it was only about 9 P.M., I'd enjoyed the "Any Questions," and rather relished the prospect of socializing with the Glitterati. Food was served—I chose delicious

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chicken coriander and boiled spuds which went down handsomely with a glass or three of Cabernet Sauvignon. I sat at a table with Miles, Carolyn, J. Mortimer, D. Moggach, C. Stone and her bloke. Moggach did much of the talking to begin with—a long spiel about how she'd recently encouraged her cleaning lady to commit adultery, a story imparted in copious detail. All three novelists—Moggach, Mooney, and Mortimer (to put them in shelving order)—share a common interest in television: their books have been turned into successful TV programs, they adapt books for TV (Moggach was currently working on *Moll Flanders*), and/or they make other TV programs. It was a stimulating evening and one that will allow me to name-drop for some time to come.

9 June. The man from Gardners, the wholesaler we switched to from Bertrams a month back, came today to install our computer. For fourteen years we have been completely unmechanized, and have always relied on *Books in Print,* publishers' and, latterly, wholesalers' catalogues. And, of course, our own heads. So our move to a fully automated system for sales, ordering, and book search is like some mountain tribe in New Guinea suddenly acquiring television and pocket calculators.

The hardware was unpacked, the software loaded, and I was shown how to work the various items on the Menu. It really proved very simple, though I can't help regretting that I will be relying less and less on the catalogue in my head, in the same way that the advent of the calculator stopped one using mental arithmetic.

13 June. A tiring and tiresome day at Ex Libris, and several customers determined not to part with any dosh. First a family whose young son found a book he really wanted but was dissuaded by his parents from spending all his money in one go; second, a woman who asked for the cookery books. Asked whether she was looking for anything in particular, she told me she wanted a recipe for Elderflower Champagne. I found precisely that in our best-selling *Gran's Old-Fashioned Remedies, Wrinkles, and Recipes* (Ex Libris Press, 1988), whereupon she coolly requested of me a pencil and paper so that she could copy it down. Just after that a bloke asked for road atlases, which I indicated. He picked out the *Ordnance Survey Motoring Atlas,* inquired the cost, then asked whether we had any copies of last year's edition at half-price. I said no and he skulked off.

Tonight I loaded the car with copies of our new book *The Romany Way,* which I collected from Cromwell Press last Friday. I'm pleased with the finished copies, notwithstanding the shocking pink cover.

16 June. In Devizes this morning visiting the bookshops. It was market day and I passed a group of gypsy women with cracked, leathery faces trying to sell tiny bunches of heather. I always studiously avoid such encounters, but thought I should like to show them a copy of *The Romany Way.* I approached one who offered me her hand to shake, so I thrust a copy of the book into it and asked whether she knew the young gypsy woman depicted on the cover. Her companions quickly crowded round and seemed most interested in the book, demanding to know how much the woman got for appearing on the cover. Then one remembered to ask me to buy her heather for luck. I couldn't refuse, and asked how much: a pound for a bunch, or a mere two pounds for her remaining four bunches. I had only £1.90 in change, but was told that would suffice, whereupon I received the heather and was wished seven years' good luck. So perhaps *Belt & Buckle* will be read on Radio 4, and one of our books will win a major literary prize.

18 June. A package arrived by Sea Mail from Japan—my six complimentary copies of the Japanese edition of *Winifred: A Wiltshire Working Girl.* I feel totally gobsmacked at first sight of the pages of incomprehensible hieroglyphics and a book which begins at the end and whose typography is organized in columns rather than lines. I brought home a copy and placed it in my trophy cabinet of Ex Libris publications, where it now takes pride of place.

20 June. Have decided against keeping the computer. I'm very thankful that I have it on approval and can return it if not Satisfied. I have written a letter to Gardners Sales Manager explaining my reasons—*viz.,* that "Book Bank" is slow and unreliable (it has never

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heard of W. H. Auden!) and that the Special Order Service does not work satisfactorily. I plan to send a check for £100 by way of compensation for all the trouble they've gone to, and have offered personally to return the hardware to Bexhill on Sea next Thursday. So it will be a return to the Stone Age at Ex Libris—and a considerable relief!

14 July. To London to attend an Open Meeting of the International Publishers Guild. The subject is "Computer Literacy, Artistry, and Numeracy." A demonstration of the Excel spreadsheet program convinced me that I should have one; and the "Artistry" speaker advised I acquire an Apple Quadra.

15 July. Pricing several boxes of fairly unexciting second-hand books this evening, I came across a volume with the following note before the contents page:

> None of the characters in this book is imaginary, though whether any of them is real, metaphysics has yet to decide.

25 July. Heard this morning that old (Quaker) friend Margery Still is dying of cancer. I wrote to her on Friday—what do you say to someone who finds herself in such a position—and received a reply this morning in which she thanks me for "a lovely letter." She goes on to say that she and a friend have the idea that she might collect some of the pieces she has written and had published in the Quaker weekly, *The Friend,* and suggested that "if we get stuck at any stage we could call on you for advice." She thinks it would be rather nice to sell copies at her funeral. Margery admits she has an inoperable and untreatable cancer, but that, as a result, she is receiving a generous weekly allowance which she has earmarked for getting her book into print. I'm sure this is an extraordinary way to spend such an allowance, but I know it is for a purpose which will make Margery very happy. So, it seems I have another little task in the pipeline!

15 August. Back in the shop after a nine-day absence. Spent the first hour or so going through the mail—a fair crop of orders but no MSS or proposals for books or other surprises. An enthusiastic review of *Lumber Jill* in the *Arboricultural Journal,* subtitled *The International Journal of Urban Forestry.* Not exactly the mass media, but I dare say it will prompt a few orders. Feel slightly down at being back on the sharp end—I always feel it a wrench to go away on holiday, but after a few days of Jersey sea and sun I begin to get quite used to gently walking and swimming the days away, and feel confined back in the shop.

25 August. Received request from Barnicoats, the wholesaler, for authorization to return a number of books. On Monday I had sent them a statement for an amount of £800 which is now outstanding. I am not usually so prompt in sending statements but, with all the rumours that are flying about the state of Barnicoats, I am getting jittery. With five major wholesalers now offering an almost identical service, it seems they cannot all survive; from where I sit it looks as though Barnicoats is the most likely to go under.

26 August. Read in today's *Bookseller* that Barnicoats made 31 of their employees—about a third of their work force—redundant last month.

31 August. A letter arrived this morning addressed to "Ex Bibris," which sounds more like an organization for reformed alcoholics. But it is a while since the freestanding wooden letters which surmount a bookcase in the Old Book Barn have been rearranged to read "SEX LIBRI," which rather suggests free love.

5 September. Computer disk arrived from Margery Still's grandson with the material she wishes to include in her "memorial book." Her title is *Still Here,* which, in the circumstances of her impending demise, is a double pun and grimly funny.

15 September. I was keying in the final corrections to Margery's copy when her daughter telephoned to tell me she had died. It's sad that Margery won't see the finished book. She had riffled the pages on her sickbed and what she saw "had brought a smile to her face."

3 October. At closing time, my assistant, Jim, told me about the latest royal scandal block-

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buster: *Princess in Love.* It has been kept under wraps and publication was announced today. Jim had heard about the book on the morning news and had telephoned Bertrams to see whether they could supply us. They'd had 3,000 copies delivered this morning and had only a couple of hundred remaining. Jim asked for two copies to be reserved for us.

4 October. Our two copies of *Princess in Love* arrived along with the rest of our Bertrams order. I cannot resist putting a copy in the window with a label as follows: "Grubby, tawdry, worthless—Buckingham Palace," which was the official comment on the book.

Learn that the 75,000 print run of *Princess in Love* has sold out on the day of publication, though we've yet to shift one at Ex Libris. I wonder if any book buyer has yet parted with £8.95 for a copy of *Writers on the South-West Coast?* It is incredible to think that Bloomsbury, the publishers of *Princess in Love,* have generated sales of over £1 million in one day (75,000 x £14.99 = £1,124,250). Publication of such a grubby, tawdry, and worthless book won't do much for Bloomsbury's rather literary and worthy image, but no doubt they're laughing all the way to the bank.

10 October. Remove our two copies of *Princess in Love* from the shop, to return to Bertrams for credit. No book has suffered such a short shelf life at Ex Libris! It created absolutely no interest here, as royal books are accustomed so to do in Bradford on Avon.

14 October. The lead story in today's *Bookseller* is about the demise of Barnicoats. Jonathan Barnicoat blames an outstanding very large debt, but I guess this was rather the last straw than the prime cause. The receivers are hoping to revive the business, but my guess is that Barnicoats will disappear without trace. *The Bookseller* also reports that Bloomsbury have reprinted a further 90,000 copies of *Princess in Love.*

11 November. We've had a spate of Americans in the shop recently, asking to use "the bathroom." Hazel, Jim, and myself all now realize that by this they mean the lavatory. Our lav. could properly be described as a bog—it's outdoors, propped against an old stone wall which drips in all but the driest conditions; the floor is constantly wet and the resident snails devour the toilet paper. It's really not nice, as many a well-brought-up child, taken short, has remarked. But how do you handle American adults? Hazel thinks they should not be encouraged.

6 December. Felt I could not avoid putting up Christmas decorations in shop any longer, so grit my teeth and dig out the string of fairy lights, now of almost antique status, and various glitzy items which we dangle from the ceiling. The shop is absolutely stacked out with books—multiple copies of Alan Bennett's *Writing Home* and *The Book of the Archers,* which I predict will be our two best-selling hardbacks this Christmas—and scores of orders awaiting collection, so the only place for decorations is between the top shelf and the ceiling.

12 December. Amongst the steady stream of customers in the shop today was a lady who asked for *A Brief History of Time,* Stephen Hawking's blockbuster re the origin of the Universe and all that. We've sold a remarkable number of copies of this slim volume over recent years at £14.99 a go. We had a copy on the shelf, I completed the transaction, and the customer departed, only to return some minutes later to say, no, she wanted a copy of *A Brief History of Time.* It was then that I realized she was referring to a recently published book on the herb, entitled *A Brief History of Thyme.*

24 December. Happy to report that Christmas Eve closed with a record day's takings, Christmas week a record week, and, so far, a record December. One of the very few books which was unavailable and which I could have sold was *All the Trouble in the World,* by the right-wing American satirist P. J. O'Rourke. As usual on Christmas Eve, a sudden hush fell just before five o'clock; my penultimate customer left with a second-hand copy of Konrad Lorenz's *On Aggression,* a curious choice for Christmas; my last customer with a second-hand paperback copy of *Passage to India,* and the just-reissued W. J. Burley's *Wycliffe and the Three-Toed Pussy* (the TV detective).

So ends this journal of a year in the life of a provincial bookman.

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• BOOKS •

REREADING

Recollected in Tranquillity

WENDY LESSER

I was never very fond of either Pope or Wordsworth. When I first read them, as an undergraduate, they figured in my life as merely assigned reading, and not particularly welcome assignments at that. Though I admired the occasionally witty turn of phrase, Alexander Pope struck me overall as too rigid, too arch, too artificial, too emotionless. William Wordsworth erred in the opposite direction: prolix, vague, sentimentally nostalgic, and maudlin when not excessively exuberant. These were the respective flaws, I felt, of "neoclassical" and "romantic" poetry (the academic rubrics under which I had been introduced to the two poets), and I had no desire to read further in either category.

The poets I liked best at the time were Emily Dickinson and Gerard Manley Hopkins. I still like them. They permanently shaped my idea of what good poetry is, so that when I later encountered John Donne, Wilfred Owen, Randall Jarrell, and Thom Gunn, my instant attachment to their poems owed something to that earlier affinity. What *was* the affinity, exactly? Not religious feeling—I lack it entirely, and so does Thom Gunn. Not scalpel-like precision of language (Jarrell and Owen can be faulted there), or its seeming opposite, the overtones of everyday speech: Donne's and Hopkins's intense compression can hardly be said to resemble talk. Not, or not quite, the ability to render pain in words. I might call what they have in common "forcefulness." The feeling of the poems is vitally, rhythmically present on the surface, even as something more mixed and difficult—in the way of logic, grammar, metaphor, allusion—is going on underneath. You can love these poets the first time you read them, even if you are young and inexperienced, and that accessibility has nothing to do with either simplicity or complexity. It has to do with how deeply they can burrow under your skin.

What this has meant, in my case, is that I can never get sufficient distance to reread my earlier favorites. Particularly if I have memorized the poem, as I did with Dickinson's "I heard a Fly buzz—when I died" and Hopkins's "MÁRGARÉT, áre you gríeving / Over Goldengrove unleaving?" the initial reading and the successive rereadings fit as neatly over one another as congruent triangles, so that the uppermost one disappears into those beneath it. I can get older, and read more about poetry, and acquire unrelated tastes in all sorts of fields, and suffer in different ways, and experience new kinds of happiness, all of which *should* change me as a reader; and yet when I look at or hear one of those old poems again, I am carried back to the exact same pleasure I felt at the beginning—mainly by the sound alone (if the sound of meaningful words can ever be said to be "alone"). Since I understood these poems, at some level, the first time I read them, I don't need to change my relation to them as time passes. Need aside, I can't.

The opposite is true of Pope and Wordsworth. I still don't love them, and I doubt I ever will. But a recent rereading of Pope's

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"Epistle IV" in the *Moral Essays* and Wordsworth's Immortality Ode has convinced me that I hadn't a clue what those poems were about when I read them the first time. They meant nothing to my undergraduate self, who, balked by their apparent impenetrability, constructed meanings to substitute for those she couldn't find, thus obscuring the poems with the shadow of her own limitations. Yet now these two poems seem startlingly clear—so clear that, in retrospect, I find it hard to understand how I could so willfully have misunderstood them.

I came back to Pope's "Epistle IV: To Richard Boyle, Earl of Burlington" through gardening. I think I got to it by way of Michael Pollan's lovely book *Second Nature,* but no matter: the point is that I would not have been reading the Pollan (or anything else about gardening) if I had not lately become a gardener myself.

Some people use the word *Gardener* as they would *Painter* or *Sculptor* or *Poet,* implying a degree of accomplishment and professionalism that might warrant using the term to fill in the occupation blank on one's tax return. I do not mean I became a gardener in that respect; my use of the word is strictly lowercase. But I did experience a transformation of sorts. For forty-four years, I paid no attention whatsoever to anything that was growing outside the houses I lived in (except under duress, as a child, when I was occasionally forced to help weed the yard). And then, in 1996, my husband and child and I moved into a house with a beautiful garden, and I adopted it as my own. Home ownership no doubt played a part, this being the first piece of real estate that I had ever been instrumental in buying. My love for the house as a piece of architecture helped, too: I felt that the beautiful old Victorian deserved its charming setting, and I meant to keep it up. But one cannot discount the mere passage of time as a factor. I had reached the age where patience, willingness to compromise, and tolerance of the unexpected—the great lessons of gardening—were qualities I could at long last begin to acquire.

Most of what I learned about gardening I learned from the garden itself. My predecessor had been a woman of excellent taste, with an eye for attractive combinations and pleasing variations, and I felt a caretaker's responsibility to perpetuate her work. For the first year, I pulled up almost nothing that was not a verifiable weed. I let all four seasons pass, in order to see what she had been growing during each, and though I added flowers and lettuces and herbs and vines to the existing pattern, I confined my subtracting energies to careful pruning. By the second year, I had begun to read about gardens and to talk over possible choices with gardening friends; I had also become a regular at Berkeley Horticultural Nursery, the hub of local gardening. Emboldened by my new knowledge, I ripped out a woebegone rosebush and replaced it with a Madame Grange clematis, added a rock garden and ornamental grasses, planted fuchsias and abutilons and lilies and hostas where none had grown before, and eventually designed and set out a whole shade garden, complete with ferns and mosses.

Through all of this, however, I left the garden's existing structure intact. The basic landmarks I had inherited—an old brick path, a towering redwood, some smaller trees (apple, date palm, magnolia, Japanese maple), a partially enclosing eight-foot-high laurel hedge, an adjoining natural-wood picket fence, and a profusion of purple-spiked Mexican sage, silver artemisia, and orange-flowered clivia—are all still in place, and I like to think that despite the numerous changes I've made, the previous owner would recognize what was once her garden.

In the course of this process, I had many small failures. Sometimes the problem was horticultural or botanical in origin: slugs ate all my verbenas, a fuchsia mite destroyed my earliest fuchsia, and a gardenia simply refused to blossom or even survive in my excessively clayey soil. But just as often the problem was aesthetic. I planted lilies where I thought the colors of the blooms would blend in well, but the five-foot vertical stalks looked silly against their low-growing neighbors. I let my predecessor's dahlia grow ferociously, only to discover belatedly that I hated both the ragged leaves and the grotesque, oversized blossoms. Charmed by the white calla lilies that had come with the garden, I planted hybrid versions in acid yellow and deep mauve; luckily these died of their own accord, before I had to face up to the egregiousness of my undeveloped taste.

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The botanical errors were ones that pretty much had to be made—you don't really know what will grow in a particular place in a particular garden until you try it—but the aesthetic errors were, I now think, due mainly to my ignorance as a novice gardener. Eventually you learn to see in your mind's eye what something will look like when planted, and you learn to refrain from the severest lapses before they even take place. This is true on the macro level of the garden as well as the micro. Nothing looks as ridiculous, I have noticed during my drives around Berkeley, as a tiny flower-bordered lawn introduced to the sidewalk by the sort of huge ornamental gate one might find at an English country house. There are many things I would *like* to have in my garden, in the abstract: a Japanese-style wooden entrance, arcade trellises covered with purple and white wisteria, a pond bordered with tall grasses, an Italian fountain, a symmetrically laid out herb garden, a gnarled Australian tea-tree, and so on. But all of them together, if you combined them in a single garden, would look random and excessive, and any *one* of them would look ludicrous in my relatively tiny street-corner plot. A garden, I have learned, sets its own limits on what you can do with it, and good taste in gardening is at least partly a function of careful observation. You can project your own ideas only so far: beyond that, you need to be responsive to the demands of the place.

This, it turns out, was what Alexander Pope was saying in the fourth Epistle. "Consult the Genius of the Place in all," he urges in this poem about (among other things) garden design:

> To build, to plant, whatever you intend,
> To rear the Column, or the Arch to bend,
> To swell the Terras, or to sink the Grot;
> In all, let Nature never be forgot.
> But treat the Goddess like a modest fair,
> Nor over-dress, nor leave her wholly bare;
> Let not each beauty ev'ry where be spy'd,
> Where half the skill is decently to hide.

Good advice, though it sounds a bit general on the surface. But when you have actually worked your own garden for several years, you understand precisely what Pope means about the delightfulness of secret corners and the need for restraint in planting. You have made exactly the mistakes he is criticizing here, so you can supply your own examples and counter-examples.

Pope has a feel for the specifics, too—specifics both of season and of foliage. His lines about the character who "sat delighted in the thick'ning shade, / With annual joy the red'ning shoots to greet" could have been written from underneath my Japanese maple in April, when the shade *does* thicken as the once-bare tree leafs out with literally reddish shoots. Even the abbreviated present participle—"thick'ning," "red'ning"—has more than a rhythmic function here, for it imitates the paradoxical quality of spring's arrival, simultaneously ongoing and abrupt.

Needless to say, I missed all this on my first time through the poem. That an academically approved poem could actually be about gardening, and be filled with practical advice on the subject, was beyond my ken. So I made it instead into some kind of abstract rant about Taste and Hypocrisy. I know this, unfortunately, because in my edition of Pope, these pages are filled with my youthful and never-less-than-idiotic marginalia. "Myth" and "live statue," the pencil scribbles madly, next to a line that quite obviously refers to a fountain in the shape of Cupid. "Hypocrisy—ignorance," "majesty a nuisance," "false religiosity," I maunder on, getting further and further afield. The sound of myself hopelessly flailing around carries clearly across the distance of more than twenty-five years. "Theme," I note in desperation when I come across a pithy comment. But do I really have any idea what that means? Evidently not, for I have written it next to a couplet that is sufficiently straightforward to require no commentary whatsoever:

> Something there is, more needful than Expence,
> And something previous ev'n to Taste—'tis Sense.

I took this, in 1972, as an artistic dictum, a high-flown theory about creation, whereas now I can see that Pope is simply warning us against that oversized ornamental entrance—hoping to insure that we do not (as he puts it) "Turn Arcs of triumph to a Garden-gate."

Perhaps my most embarrassing marginal note is to be found near the lines

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> Spontaneous beauties all around advance,
> Start ev'n from Difficulty, strike from Chance;
> Nature shall join you; Time shall make it grow
> A Work to wonder at . . .

Next to this I've scribbled, "Useful things of the past now seem elegant." Well, no, Wendy. This is not a disquisition about decorative antiquities. "Time shall make it grow" is a literal description of how a garden works, maturing and changing and enhancing itself as the years pass, not necessarily in the manner envisaged by the gardener. That's why "spontaneous" and "chance" (and even "difficulty"—all those failed plantings!) are such crucial gardening words. The flower seeds that get dropped by passing birds, the separate vines that twine together on the fence, the moss that fills in around the bricks or stepping-stones—these are the means through which nature and time together develop the garden in a way that cannot be imitated by the mere exercise of human will.

From this distance, I can also see how my blindness to Pope's subject matter contributed to my tone-deafness in regard to his poetry. I'm not saying that the "Epistle to Burlington" is a great poem, by the standards of Donne or Dickinson; I still agree with my earlier self in finding it chilly and artificial. But now it seems to me that the artificiality has an instructive function. The strict neoclassical verse stands in marked contrast to the inimitable, surprising landscapes Pope uses that verse to praise. When he criticizes the sort of overdesigned garden where

> No pleasing Intricacies intervene,
> No artful wildness to perplex the scene;
> Grove nods at grove, each Alley has a brother,
> And half the platform just reflects the other

one can't help but hear this as literary self-criticism. The rows and rows of matching couplets in traditional Augustan verse recall the gardens Pope doesn't like: symmetrical, exact, unremittingly planned, completely under conscious human control. It's true that here, as elsewhere, he has tried to break out of the straitjacket, loosening the metrical pattern so that the first line of the quatrain is noticeably shorter than the others, while the third line starts with a strong downbeat rather than the expected iamb. But the effect is a bit like trying to add variation to a garden by planting one side of an arrow-straight walkway in red tulips and the other side in yellow; the broken symmetry will still come across as symmetry. Pope admires certain gardens precisely because they do something that poetry (at least, *his* poetry) cannot: they break out of the patterns set for them, producing "spontaneous beauties" in a manner that "pleasingly confounds, / Surprizes, varies, and conceals the Bounds." If we are sadly aware of how tightly Pope is bound to his rhyme and meter, that can make us all the more sympathetic toward his manifest admiration—I would even say, his longing—for a more flexible kind of art.

Yet Pope's heroic couplets do share something with the gardens he praises: the fact that time can make them grow. It's not that the words on the page can alter by themselves, as plants and trees and flowers do. The lines of the poem must always remain the same. But the observer can change her point of observation, and this produces a new vista, a new sensation, a new understanding. What comes from this shift in perspective doesn't have to be a large or permanent understanding. The pleasures of the reread poem, like the pleasures of the garden, can be tiny and ephemeral and nonetheless matter deeply. The point, in both cases, is that they descend on one from the outside, like a gift. My will alone did not bring about an increased capacity to enjoy Pope's poem. It just came to me with the passage of time.

Luckily, I left no marginalia on Wordsworth's Ode, and in any case I doubt that I still have the copy I originally read. When I came back to the poem again, it was through Lionel Trilling's essay "The Immortality Ode," which I came across while reading *The Liberal Imagination*. A word on this. I had owned *The Liberal Imagination* for many years, and a penciled price of $2.40 on the inside cover of my 1976 Scribner's paperback suggests that it was old even when I bought it, but I had never, apparently, read it. I *thought* I had, because its author and title were so much a part of the academic air I breathed in my youth; Trilling's book had been valued by most of the people

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who taught me. But when I picked it up to reread it, I discovered it was practically all new to me. And what a discovery it was. My first response was an almost paralyzing admiration: why had anyone bothered to write literary criticism after Lionel Trilling, when he had already said everything worth saying? And even when I calmed down a bit—enough to see that there were perhaps a few dark corners his wise clearsightedness had left unclarified—I remained filled with enormous respect for his enterprise. He was speaking about things that mattered in a voice that presumed his readership cared about such things, and the strength of that assurance, in the face of the four subsequent decades' experience to the contrary, powerfully bolstered me. This was literary criticism I could learn from.

About Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood" Trilling said many useful things, and then he sent me back to the poem itself, reproducing it in full at the end of his chapter. I have reread the poem many times in the months since then (for poetry is the form that most invites rereading, its density ensuring that you will harvest new meanings at each return and its brevity making such returns manageable), but what I did first was to reread Trilling's essay. Fresh from the poem now, I was struck even more by the essay's truth, especially when Trilling was arguing against those who believed that the Immortality Ode was merely, or essentially, about Wordsworth's own poetry writing. He was answering both the biographical critics of his own era and, presciently, the deconstructive theorists of mine when he said, "And it seems to me that those critics who made the Ode refer to some particular and unique experience of Wordsworth's and who make it relate only to poetical powers have forgotten their own lives and in consequence conceive the Ode to be a lesser thing than it really is, for it is not about poetry, it is about life."

The errors I made on my own first reading were not precisely those that Trilling was criticizing, for when I first read the Immortality Ode, I knew too little about Wordsworth to hazard a biographical interpretation and I had lived too little to have forgotten my own life. All I could see was that Wordsworth harped incessantly on childhood. The poem, it seemed to me, was about childhood (when it was not about nature, a subject I found equally distasteful). At nineteen, I had only recently emerged from childhood myself, so I could not imagine why anyone would want to glorify it the way Wordsworth was doing: "A six years' Darling of a pigmy size . . . glorious in the might / Of heaven-born freedom," or, worse yet:

> Not in entire forgetfulness,
> And not in utter nakedness,
> But trailing clouds of glory do we come
> From God, who is our home:
> Heaven lies about us in our infancy!

Everything about this passage, from the transmigration-of-souls bit through the God-and-heaven references to the final exclamation point, was designed to get my rationalist goat.

And even now I find such moments in the poem hard to bear. Wordsworth's labored ecstasy is one of his least charming characteristics, and his religious feeling, unlike Hopkins's or Donne's, fails to communicate itself to an unbeliever. But now that I am more than a decade older than Wordsworth was when he started this poem, I begin to understand what he meant by it. "Intimations of Immortality" is not a poem about childhood; if it were, it would not need "Recollections" in its title. It is a poem about middle age.

There is no point in telling this to undergraduates. The paradox of teaching Wordsworth is that he cannot be taught, for there are moments in the Immortality Ode that literally can't be understood until you have been through something like them yourself. It may be rude and pedagogically unhelpful to say this; still, I think it is not only true, but one of the great things about the poem. Contrary to my initial impressions, the Ode is not based on a lot of sappy generalizing about youth and age and inspiration and despair. It is, instead, a direct transcription of an experience, and until you have gone through it yourself, you cannot recognize the description's power. That we all do, if we live long enough, undergo that experience is part of what Trilling meant by castigating "those who have forgotten their own lives" and have therefore misread the poem.

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There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it hath been of yore;—
Turn wheresoe'er I may,
By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

The whole emotional weight of this opening rests on the contrast of tenses. Preterite ("did seem") modulates into present perfect ("have seen"), and the two of them are set against the comparatively empty, negative present ("it is not," "can see no more"). The word "now" echoes through the stanza like a funeral bell, tolling twice in four lines. This is the essence of the elegiac: a heightened past envisioned from the standpoint of a diminished present.

When I first read the Immortality Ode, and for many years after, I felt that I inhabited an utterly continuous self. I was the same person I had always been. The memories and feelings of me-at-ten and me-at-twenty (and, later, me-at-thirty as well) all belonged to the same recognizable character. I possessed my past fully at each point, and each point was an element in the unbroken line that made up my life. Or so I thought. (We are talking about feeling here, not necessarily reality.) And then, not too long ago, all this changed. I began to see my younger self from a distance, as if she were another person. I started to wonder at her decisions, at why or how she had made them—decisions that led up to my being where and who I am now, that person with a husband and child, that woman who lives in a Victorian house with a well-kept garden. I began, in this sense, to reread my past.

And it seemed to me, when I looked at things in this way, that some kind of internal engine had begun to slow down. That is exactly how I thought of it: as a motor that each of us carries around inside us, moving us forward, fueling our actions and choices and desires. My motor had once run very fast, and that alone had preoccupied me. It was enough to keep me going on its own, without much outside stimulation. It tossed up ideas faster than I could consume them, furnishing me with more than enough to think about and write about. And then, sometime after I turned forty, I became aware (but suddenly, not at all gradually) that the little internal motor was no longer sufficient. Its beat had weakened, and it needed much more constant infusions from the outside—in the form of people, events, artworks, conversation, city life—to keep me going. The narcissism of youth had been replaced by the narcissism of middle age: I was more interested in the outside world, but I was also more interested in my own past, as a thing apart from myself but linked to myself.

O joy! that in our embers
Is something that doth live,
That nature yet remembers
What was so fugitive!
The thought of our past years in me doth breed
Perpetual benediction . . .

When Wordsworth uses the first-person plural here, it is neither an accident nor a mere rhetorical convention, as you can see when he shifts momentarily to the singular ("in *me* doth breed"). The experiences he describes belong to all of us; what he calls "celestial light" and what I am calling a little motor is born into everyone, not just poets (though poets may be the ones most likely to consider the effect of such experiences, and their affect). For Wordsworth, this initial radiance, this intimation of immortality, comes from the soul's connection with the infinite, with God:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting . . .

As for my motor, I couldn't begin to say where I think it comes from. But Wordsworth and I needn't agree on this point. It is enough that we both feel that the internal spark was once there and is now gone, or at least faded, accessible only through recollection.

The effect of this realization—whether it makes you melancholy, or sardonic, or desperate, or thoughtful—depends in large part on your character. We do not all respond to this universal experience in the same way. Wordsworth became elegiac. Robert Musil became bitterly humorous, or so it would seem from a marvelous passage in *The Man Without Qualities*

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in which the main character remarks of a friend, "There is no second such example of inevitability as that offered by a gifted young man narrowing himself down into an ordinary man, not as the result of any blow of fate, but through a kind of pre-ordained shrinkage."

Something of this same sense of inevitability also appears in the Wordsworth poem, when he speaks about the child's role-playing:

> The little Actor cons another part;
> Filling from time to time his 'humorous stage'
> With all the Persons, down to palsied Age,
> That Life brings with her in her equipage;
> As if his whole vocation
> Were endless imitation.

There is a thrilling vertiginousness to this passage, because it captures in one snapshot—or rather, in one brief sequence of home-movie film—both the child's game and the adult take on that game. That is, Wordsworth is simultaneously referring to a real if imagined child (the "six years' Darling of a pigmy size" who inhabits this whole section of the poem) and setting up a much larger, more abstract allegory of human existence. And the whole pathos of the stanza, or at any rate a large part of it, comes from the way those two evocations fail to match up. What is a funny game for the child is a terrible truth for us; his fast-forward is our rewind, but with a difference, because hindsight actually alters the meaning of the events themselves.

The writer Jenny Diski, in a wonderful Diary piece published in the *London Review of Books*, talks about turning fifty and looking back on being nine. What gives her article a Wordsworthian twist is that she remembers being nine and trying, unsuccessfully, to imagine herself at fifty. "But the best I can do," she recalls in the voice of that younger self, "is to imagine someone who is not me, though not someone I know, being 50. She looks like an old lady. . . . I can't connect me thinking about her with the fact that I will be her in 41 years' time." So Diski, at nine, does "the next best thing. I send a message out into the future, etch into my brain cells a memo to the other person, who will be me grown to 50, to remember this moment, this very moment, this actual second when I am nine, in bed, in the dark, trying to imagine being 50."

And now, at fifty, Jenny Diski receives the memo. "The vividness of her making a note to remember the moment when she is 50 is startling," says Diski, maintaining the third-person way of viewing her other self that she invented when she was nine. "But it's not a simple, direct link. I have the moment, but the person I connect with is someone whose future I know. I do not know the nine-year-old as she was then, at all; the one who had not yet experienced the life I led between her and me." The feeling of disconnected connection, of "having arrived at the unimaginable point she reached out towards," gives rise in Diski to exactly the feelings I got from the Wordsworth passage: "a sense of vertigo, something quite dizzying." This is the sensation that accompanies the deep shock of perceiving our own life's one-way-ness—or, as Jenny Diski says about her younger self, "of recalling her message and being in a position—but not able—to answer it."

If I, on the verge of turning fifty, am drawn to moments like those in Diski's essay and Wordsworth's poem, it is not just because our "whole vocation" is "endless imitation." That is, I am not solely moved by seeing the recapitulation of my life in other lives, hearing their tale as also my tale, though this is naturally a part of what moves me. It is always good to have articulate company. But reassuring notions of universality and common ground seem singularly out of place here. For what I feel, reading their "recollections of early childhood," is the very specificity of memory's texture, and hence the deeper pathos inherent in the fact of separation: even *this* adult, the one person in the world who might be supposed to have a direct connection with his or her remembered childhood self, cannot cross that gap.

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The 1999 Phi Beta Kappa Book Awards

The Phi Beta Kappa Award in Science

THE ELEGANT UNIVERSE: SUPERSTRINGS, HIDDEN DIMENSIONS, AND THE QUEST FOR THE ULTIMATE THEORY. *By Brian R. Greene. W. W. Norton.* $27.95.

Citation: Brian R. Greene's ultimate goal is to explain the current status of "superstring" theory and the fundamental conflicts in theoretical physics that the theory purports to resolve. Along the way he introduces the general theory of relativity and the early development of quantum mechanics. He introduces paradoxes at the outset and presents lively analogies that drive home their reality. His language is engaging without condescension. He conveys the logical power of mathematical arguments without turgid formalism. His firsthand account of the development of superstring theory is enlivened with human interest stories. *The Elegant Universe* is a splendid example of difficult science made understandable, indeed convincing, to a non-scientific readership.

The Christian Gauss Award

MEMORY AND NARRATIVE: THE WEAVE OF LIFE-WRITING. *By James Olney. University of Chicago Press.* $35.

Citation: *Memory and Narrative* is a learned and frequently brilliant study of relationships between memory and narrative in autobiographical writings spanning sixteen hundred years. The bulk of the work is on a line of continuity from St. Augustine through Rousseau to Samuel Beckett; these three writers dominate the foreground. There are also substantial analyses of work by Vico, Kafka, Henry James, Christa Wolf, and others. In scope, depth, and grasp of subject, James Olney's *Memory and Narrative* is an important book.

The Ralph Waldo Emerson Award

A HISTORY OF MADNESS IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY GERMANY. *H. C. Erik Midelfort. Stanford University Press.* $55.

Citation: In *A History of Madness in Sixteenth-Century Germany*, H. C. Erik Midelfort examines individual cases of madness as well as St. Vitus' dance, legal theory and practice, concepts of blameworthiness, early versions of the insanity defense, court fools, and hospital practice. While teeming with concrete, contextually specific data, the book's historical, psychiatric, sociological, cultural, and moral perspective and relevance span geography and centuries as Professor Midelfort describes how views of madness changed during a period long past. This is a work that exemplifies the best historical traditions of empirical scholarship, and it shows how that kind of research can advance moral inquiry. Midelfort pleads in his last sentence for a kind of humility: "Overcoming our sense that we know better what is human and rational, or bestial and mad, may be one of the melancholy satisfactions conveyed by a history of madness drawn from so long ago."

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Life in the Diggings

RICHARD NICHOLLS

ROARING CAMP: THE SOCIAL WORLD OF THE CALIFORNIA GOLD RUSH
By Susan Lee Johnson. Norton. $27.95.

For a very long time, the persistent popular version of the California Gold Rush of 1849 held that it consisted largely of a flood of young men from the settled regions of the country, pouring into a wild, largely empty landscape in search of sudden wealth. Historians have been chipping away at that blithe tale for decades. The Gold Rush was in fact an international phenomenon: men and women came in numbers from Central and South America, from Europe, and from Asia to stake their claims. In many locations, foreigners (at least in the early years of the Rush) outnumbered American prospectors. The land that they were all struggling to exploit, far from being tenantless, had in fact been home for many decades to colonial Spanish and then Mexican communities, and for a much longer time than that to a number of Native American tribal groups.

Susan Lee Johnson, a professor of history at the University of Colorado, advances the revisionist study of the Gold Rush in this meticulously researched, precise, and lively work. Drawing on the letters, diaries, and memoirs of the forty-niners, as well as on newspapers, government reports, period pulp fiction, and court records, *Roaring Camp* offers a compelling portrait of the ways in which the experience of life in the diggings profoundly affected and altered American ideas about manhood and society. More important, Johnson redresses a long-standing imbalance by focusing on the experiences of foreign miners and their families in the camps. She has chosen to concentrate on life in the lower rim of the area in which gold was found, the "Southern Mines," which spread out over the drainage of the San Joaquín River. Both the Northern and Southern mines, the two principal gold-producing areas (there was a third area in the northwest corner of the state), were located in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada. The Southern region drew more foreign miners than the Northern, providing a richer and more volatile mix of nationalities. It also probably had a higher concentration of women; some Mexican wives accompanied their husbands to the goldfields, and a goodly number of French women, many of whom had worked as prostitutes in Paris, made their way to the region. The Southern goldfields were also the traditional home of the Sierra Miwok Indians, who proved more resilient than other Native American groups in California in weathering the many upheavals of the Gold Rush years, and in resisting attempts to move them from their traditional homeland.

The clerks and sailors, craftsmen and roustabouts, bankers and farmers from the eastern and southern states who shrugged off their old lives and headed west for wealth suffered a series of rude shocks upon arrival. The gold was there and was surprisingly plentiful at first; but a substantial number of Mexican nationals were already working the streams in which the gold was to be found. Between 1848 and 1850, Johnson notes, some ten thousand Mexicans left for California from the province of Sonora alone. Experienced Chilean miners were also on the scene. Soon to follow were Europeans, left adrift in the wake of the 1848 revolutions that had convulsed their continent. (The French went so far as to ship to California 160 soldiers who had helped put down the revolution in France and were now making a nuisance of themselves; the government also contemplated sending thousands of unemployed to California.) Last were the Chinese, who came in a steady stream in the 1850s—and, to the annoyance and amazement of the experienced forty-

Richard Nicholls, editor of *West of the Rocky Mountains, The Best of O. Henry,* and *The Unabridged Jack London,* is Literary Editor of the SCHOLAR.

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niners, showed a remarkable ability to find gold in sites that had been given up as exhausted.

When the Americans began to frequent the ramshackle towns that had sprung up near particularly rich sites, they might be able to have their washing done at a Chinese laundry, linger at a hotel to enjoy a meal prepared by a European cook, and amuse themselves in a dance hall (also known as a "fandango") staffed by Mexican women. They might also be relieved of their recent earnings by the French women who ran the tables at some of the gambling halls. They would certainly have been exposed to a unique buffet of foreign cuisine, and a rich chorus of languages, including French, German, Chinese, and many Spanish dialects, as well as a variety of native American tongues.

At their diggings they very likely worked in close proximity to people of other nationalities. Bands of Miwok Indians were frequent visitors, offering game for sale or looking for items to trade. To the surprise of many of the miners, Miwok men and women quickly learned to combine gold-panning with their traditional pursuits, and they speedily adapted to the concept of a cash economy. The various nationalities existed largely in isolated, wary groups. Some of the foreigners formed loose associations for mutual support and protection, and they tended to steer clear of American miners. And the Americans were not particularly homogeneous. They exhibited an array of regional differences and suspicions: Easterners' dislike of prospectors from southern states was exacerbated by certain Southerners' practice of using African-American slaves to work their diggings, though this flouted California law. Groups of free black men in the diggings found themselves occupying a particularly uncomfortable position, as they were the focus of both Southern anger and Eastern distrust.

Given the number of contending nationalities in the Southern Mines, and the North American miners' conviction that the gold should by rights belong to them, not to foreign interlopers, violence was probably inevitable. It was, at any rate, frequent. Vendettas, murders, and lynchings occurred intermittently. The most notorious series of incidents revolved around Joaquín Murrieta, from Sonora. Depending on one's viewpoint, he was either a ruthless bandit or a much-wronged man defying the assaults and greed of the North Americans. So many tales have grown up around Murrieta that it is hard to disentangle the fabulous from the factual. There seems to be a consensus that Anglos drove him from a rich mining claim, and that, in rapid succession, his wife was raped, his half-brother lynched, and Murrieta himself horsewhipped. He may have worked as a monte dealer for a time; then, according to whichever version one accepts, he became either a horse trader and occasional horse thief, or a bandit.

At this point, Johnson notes, the competing stories converge. "All agree that by early 1853 one or more men named Joaquín and his or their comrades were dashing in and out of the Sierra foothills on fast horses, stealing gold dust and livestock and occasionally killing people." Murrieta's defenders insist that he took only what he needed to survive, that other gangs carried out the robberies, and that he killed only those men who had abused his wife and killed his brother. Anglos tended to view him as a brave but amoral ruffian; they both admired and feared him. "For Anglo men," Johnson argues, "Joaquín was like their own worst selves —dark, sensual, impulsive, out of control." Eventually a group thought to consist of Murrieta and his men was hunted down and dispatched. The head of the man believed to be Murrieta was cut off, preserved in alcohol, and exhibited to the public.

But was it Murrieta? There is at least the possibility that it was someone else, and that Murrieta, after dying of wounds received in a skirmish, was secretly buried by his wife. He was also quickly transformed by the emerging industry of pulp chronicles. In 1854 *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murrieta* appeared. Appropriately, given the mix of nationalities at the mines, its author was John Rollin Ridge, the son of a Connecticut Yankee mother and a Cherokee father. Ridge had turned to writing after failing to make a go of it as a miner. His gaudy narrative, which presented Murrieta as a badly wronged man and a defiant hero, struck a lingering chord, and served as the inspiration for plays, poems, operas, and, eventually, even a Hollywood film (*The Robin Hood of El Dorado*). Murrieta's tale is important because it reveals with stark power the tensions, mistrust, and

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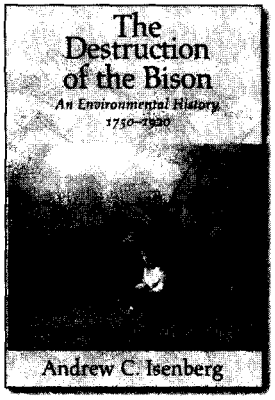

The Destruction of the Bison explains the decline of the North American bison population from an estimated 300 million in 1800 to fewer than 1000 a century later. In this wide-ranging, interdisciplinary study, Andrew C. Isenberg argues that the cultural and ecological encounter between Native Americans and Euroamericans in the Great Plains was the central cause of the near extinction of the bison. Drought and the incursion of domestic livestock and exotic species such as horses into the Great Plains all threatened the Western ecosystem, which was further destabilized as interactions between Native Americans and Euroamericans created new types of hunters in both cultures: mounted Indian nomads and white commercial hide hunters. In the early twentieth century, nostalgia about the very cultural strife that first threatened the bison became, ironically, an important impetus to its preservation.

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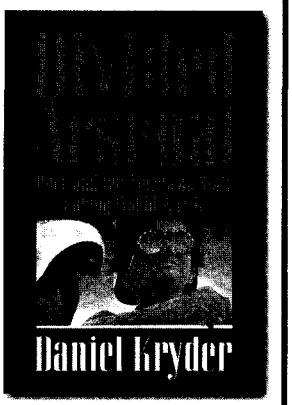

Divided Arsenal presents a fascinating account of wartime racial relations and policymaking in three vital segments of the national mobilization for war. In doing so, it analyzes the accelerated black migration to northern cities, the racial climate on southern farms, the reverse migration created when northern black recruits were sent to southern military bases, patterns of racial violence in the Army, including the uprising in 1943 at Camp Stewart, Georgia, and the creation and casework of the Fair Employment Practices Committee. Professor Kryder concludes that while the war produced a wide range of ameliorative and repressive federal race policies, particular outcomes depended on what best served the government's broader goals of winning the war and staying in power.

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mutual resentment that existed between Anglo and Mexican miners. It also illuminates the ways in which Anglo and Mexican miners viewed themselves: the Mexicans seeing themselves as brave and wronged, the Anglos presenting themselves as tough, hardworking figures harassed by shadowy predators. The success of Ridge's book also makes it clear that Murrieta's defiance aroused a degree of admiration in some North Americans, challenging their easy prejudices about the Mexicans they were seeking to displace, and making them somewhat uneasy about their attempts to make California their own.

Indeed, one of the most striking points in Johnson's persuasive study is that the experience of life in California repeatedly challenged the assumptions of North Americans about the nature of manhood and adult society. Back in the settled portions of the country, the ideal notion of society (no matter how much the reality fell short) revolved around the institution of marriage, well-established domestic routines, and a sober, well-ordered life. Women were seen as the inspiring force channeling men's worst instincts and appetites toward the good and the lawful. By contrast, life in the diggings was hectic and loose, lacking any structure outside the routines of work, and without many of the old gender restrictions. Most of the men of all nationalities came without wives or sweethearts; they had to learn not only how to pan for gold (something the majority had not done before), but how to cook meals, wash and mend their clothes, and take care of ill comrades, all tasks of the sort that would have been carried out back home by mothers, wives, or other female relatives. Men were also thrown together in an intimacy uncommon outside the military. In most parts of the goldfields, they organized mining groups; in contrast to many kinds of labor back east, one had to depend on one's fellows to have any chance of success. In certain places, household duties were assumed by Chinese immigrants, or by black slaves brought from the southern states. "In everyday events like these," Johnson writes, "Gold Rush race relations became gender relations as well." Mostly, however, men taught themselves or each other the rudiments of cooking, and invented a kind of rough domesticity. Judging by some of the letters that Johnson quotes, they developed no little pride in their ability to bake bread, create satisfying meals, sew, and keep a clean and tidy cabin.

But in a time when masculinity was seen as necessarily being assertive, undomestic, and self-reliant, this discovery of a masculine kind of domesticity was bound to create a certain unease. The erosion of old gender identities affected women as well, Johnson maintains. Many of the foreign women in the goldfields operated with an unusual degree of independence, working as storekeepers, gamblers, or prostitutes. The relatively few Anglo women were often involved in running large establishments: hotels, restaurants, bakeries, boarding-houses. They had little time to concern themselves with the niceties of domestic life. Either their husbands were periodically away at the diggings, or the workload was so great that even when their men were present, women often had to act more like partners and less like subservient dependents. They frequently ran establishments in which, because of the lack of female help, men had to be hired as cooks, waiters, and servants. Women in such businesses thus routinely had to give orders to men. Such shifts in quotidian relationships, transcending the usual constricting routines of home life, were clearly alluring—and a little alarming—to both men and women.

Everywhere they turned, the North Americans faced contradictions. The Miwoks confounded old prejudices about Indians by being hardworking, self-reliant, and occasionally very successful. Foreign miners, before they began to be relentlessly displaced from the goldfields by state legislation passed in 1850 and 1852, demonstrated a capacity for industry and resourcefulness. Many of the Anglo miners, in letters home, bemoaned the lack of an established society and the old bonds of established habits and friendships that they seemed to have left behind. Yet the wide-open, libidinous life of the gold camps and towns had an undeniable appeal. Johnson has uncovered some diaries kept by miners that record, with zest, the alcoholic sprees that some indulged in with alarming regularity, as well as their pursuit of Mexican and Miwok women. Gambling was, in many locations, an activity that took precedence over almost everything else. Mining, at this stage a kind of pre-industrial activity, freed men from the time constraints that

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were imposed back east by factories and large businesses.

Not only were the women that North Americans encountered in the diggings unlike most of those left at home: those present were mostly unobtainable, leaving the miners with few outlets for their sexuality. There seems little doubt that miners were aware of homosexual encounters—and even long-standing relationships—in the gold camps, and this behavior, so much more evident than in the towns most had come from, must have been unsettling. Wisely, given the paucity of material (while it was roguish but permissible for miners to record in their diaries a liaison with a woman, none were rash enough to leave written records of homosexual encounters), Johnson deftly marshals the available information, presents it with clarity, but resists the temptation to extract wide-ranging conclusions.

If the world of the gold camps sometimes appeared to Anglos to be a world turned riotously upside down, foreign miners frequently found it a hostile, menacing, even violent place. Envy and frustration made successful foreign miners the object of angry demonstrations. In 1849, the attempts of a sizable group of Anglos to drive Chilean prospectors off their claims sparked the so-called Chilean war. Several men on both sides died in at least one clash. The Chilean miners were ultimately driven out, despite having the laws of property on their side, and despite having attempted to secure redress through the California courts (before violence broke out, they had sought a warrant for Anglos whom they had accused of stealing their goods). A state law passed in 1850, intended to discourage foreign miners by levying a special tax on them, eventually had the desired effect. North American miners reported a "long train of fugitives" leaving the gold districts.

Not everyone was pleased. Many miners had learned to respect the foreign prospectors. A local newspaper, aware of what this mass depopulation movement would mean to many struggling merchants in the Southern Mines region, observed that "the evil is done—the foreign population, we mean the Mexicans, Sonorians,

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JAMES TURNER

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and Chileans are on the march home.... The San Joaquín district will lose from twenty to thirty thousand of her working population in the space of a few months."

Although mining was to continue on into the 1860s, the boom times quickly ebbed. In the Southern Mines, most of the prospecting had been done in streams and in other areas on or close to the surface. The easily reachable gold simply ran out. Well-financed companies, employing paid labor, began to replace the efforts of loosely organized groups of self-employed miners. Many of the men who had fled the East to escape the necessity of wage labor were faced with either becoming someone's employee once again or having to move on. Those who stayed put began to explore other kinds of work. Many married. The largely male, bacchanalian culture of the gold camps was gradually replaced by the far more sedate eastern ethos of small-town life, which so many miners claimed to have missed, but which they had also seemed to be in no great hurry to re-create. A *Business Men's Directory* published in 1856 asserted that "as the Mexican population, and the class that are ever congregated around gambling houses are removed from our midst, the security of life and property may be soon considered equal to that afforded in most places in the older States."

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The California Gold Rush created a world with fewer restrictions, in which long-standing prejudices about the nature of foreigners, women, and even the dominant definitions of sexuality were challenged. The exuberant life of the gold camps and towns, which offered both an exotic mix of cultures and an overwhelmingly masculine society, caused some men, at least in passing, to question established ideas. Free of employers, involved in an enterprise that demanded a great degree of collaboration and even comradeship, many found the existence liberating. Others, troubled by unfamiliar experiences, by close contact with other cultures, and by shifting ideas about individual and group identity, did not. Many, though, would look back at the Gold Rush era as the best time of their lives.

Johnson, by a careful attention to primary documentary material, convincingly captures the varied responses of North American prospectors to this exotic world. What emerges is a portrait of figures strikingly contemporary in their anxieties. Her study of foreign miners, striving to make a place for themselves in California despite substantial opposition, and to maintain their own cultural identity, is also detailed, sensitive, and persuasive.

"History and memory," Johnson observes, "alike begin with fragments, with filaments, and then weave those filaments together into a fabric of the past intelligible to human eyes in the present. That fabric may not always be pretty, but if it is to be preserved, it must be useful." Her signal achievement here is to demonstrate the complex reality of the 1849 Gold Rush, as opposed to the old conventional portraits of the era. She has drawn otherwise shadowy figures back into a bright light, showing both the complexities of life in the diggings and the challenges faced by the men and women who went looking for gold and found a variety of liberating or perplexing possibilities. In doing so, Susan Johnson has quietly demonstrated the ways in which the experience of the Gold Rush is still relevant in our own turbulent age and how useful its study remains.

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Caveat Lector

ALMOST EVERYONE'S GUIDE TO SCIENCE
By John Gribbin. Yale. $24.95.

Reviewed by JEREMY BERNSTEIN

Bernstein's first law of book reviewing is that every book is innocent until found guilty, with the corollary that prior convictions should probably be disclosed. In this spirit, I note that I have reviewed two of John Gribbin's previous books, written with collaborators: biographies of Richard Feynman and Stephen Hawking. Both, I felt, had the same deficiency: unmitigated hagiography. As a biographer, I know only too well how easy it is to fall in love with one's subject. One must stuff one's ears with the same sort of wax that Odysseus's sailors used, to avoid hearing the siren song of obsession. But let bygones be bygones. This is a different book and requires an open mind.

That spirit of bonhomie lasted until page four. There Gribbin quotes a pronouncement of Richard Feynman, whom he characterizes as "the greatest physicist of the twentieth century." *Greatest physicist of the twentieth century?* Where does that leave the creators of quantum theory: P.A.M. Dirac, Werner Heisenberg, and Erwin Schrödinger, or Enrico Fermi and Wolfgang Pauli, to say nothing of Niels Bohr and Albert Einstein? When the history of this century's physics is written in the next, I am sure that Feynman—along with people like Julian Schwinger, who created quantum electrodynamics—will get a page or two, while Einstein will get a whole book. But that aside, it was Feynman's pronouncement that got my attention. It is typical Feynman, and reinforces my belief that he had little interest in either the history or philosophy of physics. The former he often got factually wrong. In this instance he instructs us how to look for a new law. It involves, he says, making a guess, computing the consequences, and comparing with experiment. "[I]f it disagrees with experiment it is wrong," he concludes. If only it were really that simple.

Take the following instance. Einstein published his paper on the special theory of relativity in 1905. The first reference to it in the scientific literature was a paper from a very reputable laboratory that had tested one of the predictions of the paper and found that it disagreed with the laboratory's experimental result. According to the Feynman doctrine, quoted approvingly by Gribbin, Einstein's theory must have been wrong, and he should have gone back to the drawing board. But that is not at all what Einstein did. He knew that what mattered in his theory was its power and consistency. Given everything the theory *did* explain, he was sure that the experiment was wrong—which it was, although it took nearly a decade to sort it out. Indeed, when Feynman and Murray Gell-Mann created their theory of weak interactions—the kind that cause many particles to be unstable—they ignored a set of experiments that disagreed with the theory, and which, it turned out, were also wrong. Doing science at this level is not like looking up the correct spelling of words in a dictionary. It is more like a continual colloquy in which there are times when theorists are guided by experiment, and many times when the opposite is true. The great scientists have an intuition that guides them through this most uncertain terrain.

Gribbin's book is a survey of all the sciences, from the theory of evolution to the life cycle of stars. The latter, as Gribbin correctly notes, involves nearly every branch of modern physics: a triumph. But as I considered it, I could not think of a single idea in this that was Feynman's. In any event, I am not enough of a scientific polymath to be able to make a critical assessment of every chapter. But the ones dealing with subjects I know something about, I found marred with (to put it generously) carelessness. There are many examples; for lack of space, I will give only one. In late February of 1987, the unprepossessing supergiant blue star Sanduleak-69202, in the relatively nearby Large Magellanic Cloud, exploded as a supernova. This released an unimaginably large number of very weakly interacting antineutrinos, some

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Jeremy Bernstein's forthcoming biography of Warren Hastings is titled *Dawning of the Raj.* His most recent contribution to the SCHOLAR was "Letter from Tibet" (Summer 1997).

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nineteen of which were picked up by two detectors, one in Japan and one in a salt mine near Cleveland. These detectors—I have visited the one near Cleveland—were huge tanks of very highly purified water surrounded by photomultiplier tubes. The antineutrinos interacted with the protons in the water, producing an antielectron (a positron), which then, annihilated with a stray electron, produced a striking signal (two gamma rays of a well-defined energy) detected by the photomultipliers. Here is how Gribbin describes this. The "neutrinos [*sic*] . . . interacted with electrons [*sic*] in such a way that they left a trace." Is there any excuse for this sloppy characterization? Is this what is meant by a "guide" to science?

Furthermore, some of the book (originally published in England in 1998) is already out of date. Anyone now writing a chapter on cosmology, for example, would leave out much of what Gribbin has included, and include much that Gribbin has left out. This is the risk you take when you try to write about a field that is moving extremely quickly. Yesterday's guide may be today's antique map.

This raises the question of whether writing such an omnibus guide to science is really possible, especially if it is attempted by one individual, with his or her inevitable limitations. It is said that Enrico Fermi was the last physicist who could read the *Physical Review*, our trade journal, from cover to cover with complete understanding. But that was forty years ago, when the *Physical Review* came in one volume, covering all branches of physics. Now it comes in several, and I doubt that anyone can read any of them from cover to cover with anything like complete understanding.

Who, then, has the capacity to master all the sciences? The late Isaac Asimov, a professional biochemist, used to try to write books like this. But when he strayed outside his field, his books were vetted by professionals. I know this for a fact, because I did it for one of his books that involved atomic and nuclear physics. There were all sorts of dubious items in the manuscript that never got onto the printed page. If Gribbin's book was vetted, there is no acknowledgment of it. Pity. If he had been challenged by experts in the various fields he writes about, I am sure that this would have been a much better book. As it is, let the reader beware.

Is John Updike a Dinosaur?

MORE MATTER: ESSAYS AND CRITICISM
By John Updike. Knopf. $35.

Reviewed by SANFORD PINSKER

John Updike's sensibilities were formed by small-town America and the 1950s. The combination ought to have sunk his chances to become a serious writer, but he knew, earlier than most, that his best material would be found at the end of his rabbit-like nose. And so it was that Updike's earliest writing at once chronicled the satisfactions of ordinary life in thick, lyrical detail, and explored quieter rebellions than those being celebrated by the more flamboyant Beats. The result was a note altogether his own, one he has been playing with great success during his long and extraordinarily productive life at the writing desk.

Why, then, does my title intimate that Updike has become something of a dinosaur, out of touch with the world of what's happening now? The answer is as simple as it is sad: Updike numbers himself among those who went gaga over print at an early age, and who kept that faith while a great many others got their books on tape or in illness-of-the-week movies made for television. What they don't have—and what Updike cares deeply about—is the book that readers can hold, with pages they can turn. Small wonder, then, that every detail that goes into the making of an Updike book—fifty of them thus far—is important: "fussing with the type, the sample pages, the running heads, the dust jacket, the cover cloth—has perhaps been dearer to me than the writing process. . . . One collection of stories, *Pigeon Feathers,* had developed in the printing too narrow a top margin, and another, *Problems,* too exiguous a bottom margin. The jacket I had designed for *The Coup,* based upon a photograph of Timbuktu's boxy dried-mud houses, had been spurned by higher-

Sanford Pinsker is a professor at Franklin and Marshall College. His books include *Bearing the Bad News: Contemporary American Literature and Culture.*

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The 1999
AMERICAN SCHOLAR AWARDS

The Editorial Board and staff are pleased to announce the second annual AMERICAN SCHOLAR Awards, honoring the best writing that appeared in our pages during the past year.

"Immanuel's Ground"
by LIONEL BASNEY
Summer
Best Essay

"Marginal Notes on *Franny and Zooey*"
by DAVID SAMUELS
Summer
Best Literary Review *and*
Best Work by a Writer Under 35

"Lines Beginning with an Anacreontic Fragment"
by KATE BARNES
Summer
Best Poem

LIONEL BASNEY was professor of English at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan. He died, at 52, in a drowning accident last August—a tragedy of which our Editorial Board members were unaware when they cited "Immanuel's Ground" for its luminous mixture of evocation and analysis. DAVID SAMUELS, a New York writer who contributes often to *Harper's Magazine* and *The New Yorker*, is currently working on a novel. KATE BARNES, who lives in Appleton, Maine, is that state's first poet laureate.

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ups as making it look too much like a nonfiction book, and the solid-green jacket arrived at as a compromise became, thanks to the dulling effect of the jacket stock, not at all the brilliant, verdant green shown to me in proof."

Updike's words, now numbered in the millions, are his window on the passing American scene—so much so that future generations will gain a deeper sense of our last fifty years by reading the Rabbit tetralogy than by plodding through dutiful histories or sociological tomes. The same might be said of Updike's "casuals" (a *New Yorker* term for reportage with a personal thumbprint), book reviews, addresses, introductions, and assorted nonfiction pieces. *More Matter* collects eight years' worth of work between hard covers, filling a hefty 900 pages.

Few are likely to read it straight through; instead, I predict, they will poke around in this wide, Updikean pasture, stopping to hear what he has to say about John Cheever or Dawn Powell, art exhibits or Gene Kelly, and (perhaps most of all) about himself. That said, the bald truth is that in talking about others—either by way of reviewing their books, or sizing them up in terms of wider cultural trends—Updike is, in an important sense, talking about work he's already done, or is doing. As he reveals much about the wide range of subjects under discussion, he reveals even more about what makes John Updike, writer, tick.

As he tells us, the prospect of seeing his words in print gets his juices flowing. "An invitation into print, from however suspect a source, is an opportunity to make something beautiful"—and a chance to "discover within oneself a treasure that would otherwise have remained buried." It goes without saying that Updike has made the most of the chances that *The New Yorker* and other magazines regularly offer him; but the wonder is how consistently he turns what might have been altogether predictable into something altogether lovely. In short, if *More Matter* demonstrates anything, it is that Updike's words outlive their specific occasion. He is what used to be called, in the days when Edmund Wilson ruled the critical roost, a "man of letters." Even if our age would insist that the honorific be changed to "person of letters," it is hard to think of many who can be bracketed with Updike. Perhaps Mailer or Roth, Ozick or Oates. But even these estimable figures cannot really return us to a time when literature mattered, when American culture, as it was then interpreted, was defined by serious books. In this sense, Updike *is* a dinosaur, albeit one still toiling away at his appointed job.

Of course he has had the good fortune to write at a time when our booming economy can support serious writers—although, as Updike notes, he sees fewer people reading his novels on airplanes than he did in the 1970s and 1980s. Still, he is hardly a starving artist in the old romantic-modernist mold. And he wears his long string of successes with generosity, grace, and gratitude. The Shillington, Pennsylvania, high-schooler his classmates remember as playing pinball at the local drugstore (with a pack of cigarettes rolled up in the sleeve of his T-shirt, no less) has become a world-class writer, with all the attached rights and privileges. But what's most remarkable about Updike is that the usual trappings of fame don't matter nearly as much to him as the novel, essay, or review he is struggling with at the moment.

I've been told that serious writers divide themselves into two camps: those who take off one or two days a year (Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, a birthday), and those who look at the first group with smug contempt. Updike, minus the contempt factor, probably belongs to the second camp—daily slipping into his study because, well, that is what professional writers do.

Also, unlike many younger writers hoping to hit it big, Updike does not write with one eye on the page and the other on how a story might work as a Hollywood treatment. True enough, film versions of *Rabbit, Run* and *The Witches of Eastwick* made it to the silver screen, but with, let us say, disappointing results. My hunch is that Updike pocketed the money and regarded these dreadful film adaptations in roughly the same calm way that he deals with bad reviews.

Meanwhile, the Updike beat goes happily on, as it takes the measure of what *Time*'s Henry Luce called "the American century." Here, for example, is a snippet from a rumination on the fifties, one that packs a lyricism and wallop—a poetry, if you will—utterly unlike anything Luce could imagine, much less pen:

> The Fifties in my mind's eye are a waxy blue-white, a shining Cold War iceberg drifting by in the wake of the khaki-brown Forties and

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> the grit-gray Thirties. As a child of those two shabby, beleaguered decades, I was happy in the Fifties; I entered them as a penniless high-school senior and left them as a home-owning father of three children and the author of three books, with a fourth, *Rabbit, Run,* submitted to the publisher just as the decade ran out. Many Americans were happy in the Fifties—but not so happy, looking back, as we should have been.

And here's Updike on "dancing," or dancing as it used to be:

> What do women want? They want, evidently, to dance. Why? Why, in the days of my youth, did girls permit themselves to be seized and clumsily pushed about by sweating, overexcited, embarrassed boys? Not only did they permit it, they dressed themselves in taffeta and tulle and strapless bras to encourage its happening, and wept when it did not.

One savors sentences as good as these—and there are literally thousands in *More Matter*—as one might sip a fine liqueur. What my students call "our fast-paced, technological world" is no place for writing that is this crafted, this good. One needs to read Updike in an old-fashioned, yes, dinosaurish, way, paying patient attention to the nuances of language and the promptings of the heart.

A final word about this book's playful title, derived from a scene in *Hamlet* in which Queen Gertrude tells the blathering Polonius to produce "more matter with less art." Since this is Updike's fourth gathering of essays and criticism (his other eight-year collections include *Picked-up Pieces, Hugging the Shore,* and *Odd Jobs*), I suspect that he rather enjoyed the sly implication that here was "more matter" of a somewhat higher order.

No doubt some wag of a reviewer will say that the book contains *too much* matter, but for those of a certain (dinosaurish) age, dipping into Updike's prose will provide diversion until he brings out another eight-year retrospective—in a century that I safely predict will come to value his words even more than the past one did. To twist a running joke from the late Joseph Heller's *Catch–22,* John Updike is not only a major writer: he is a "major major" talent.

Signals and Noise

SPEAKING INTO THE AIR: A HISTORY OF THE IDEA OF COMMUNICATION

By John Dunham Peters. Chicago. $26.

Reviewed by

JAMES J. O'DONNELL

The history of an idea we never knew had a history has its charms and its risks. On one level, it may seem a work of supererogation to tell a story that no one knew needed telling. "Communication" seems so straightforward and natural an idea that it could scarcely have a history worth our attention. To find that history, it may be necessary to return, yet again, after much searching, to texts and contexts that have been worn into familiarity with overuse. Is it possible to belabor the *Phaedrus* (I say as one who has latterly belabored the *Phaedrus*) into revelations yet unseen? If we approach the Gospels with analytic eye, as Peters does, do we mean to say something about the Gospels or about the eye that sees them in 2000?

Unsympathetic readers, and some there will be, will linger with such questions and dismiss this study too readily. It has its conventionalisms and its longueurs. But it has its stretches of real freshness, and underlying it is a keen sense of the improbability of some of our most cherished cultural assumptions.

The fundamental movement of Peters's story is straightforward. What do the present and past of Western culture have to say about the mechanisms by which human beings share ideas and feelings? This is not a technologically based history, not McLuhanism in sheep's clothing, but it *is* technologically aware history —the medium is not inevitably the message, but the medium matters for Peters. Plato, the

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Gospels, Augustine, and Locke play familiar parts: some typecasting has occurred. But then there are delightful turns into less traditional and obvious neighborhoods. Take the chapter "Dead Letters": with deft twists, these pages open up the problematical nature of the supposedly private and intimate communication conveyed by letters. Among other things, privacy and intimacy turn out to have nothing essential to do with letter writing as a genre or a technology; instead they arise from modern expectations and interpretations. Our expectation of privacy in the mails was accompanied, Peters wittily shows, by our sudden fear of ways in which the mails might be used to disseminate obscene materials. Not for the first time, we see that the appeal of new means of communication is regularly accompanied by an exactly commensurate fear of them and the privacy or intimacy they offer. The expansion on the thematic consonance between the introduction of radio and ideas of telepathy is equally stimulating. Emersonian necroscopy plays a part, while the rise of the phonograph and the telephone lead to Kafka.

With insights harvested from such disparate material, we approach the core of the book: communication as myth and chimera. Augustine already led the way toward suspicion of the naturalness and transparency of human communication when he suggested that the only way the readers of his *Confessions* would know whether he spoke true or not would be if God intervened to assure them. That view both broke the ordinary vehicle of communication (language in its spoken and written forms) and raised the ante by suggesting that something magically better than ink-on-papyrus could build a bridge from one human to another. What emerges from Peters's calm and clear-eyed study is a story of those hopes and illusions.

He shows how we live unconsciously in a kind of Augustinian world of fall and hoped-for redemption, where we assume that the natural state of humankind is marked by intimate expression and heart-to-heart understanding. Failure is explained away or guiltily accepted as a correlative of the fall, while we live with the dream of closer union—the dreams of Eliot's *Four Quartets* or of Newman's motto "*Cor ad cor loquitur*" (heart speaketh unto heart). What Peters succeeds in showing is the baselessness of the assumptions on which those dreams are built. The default mode, so to speak, of human communication is incomprehension and distance. "Communication" is a hard-won achievement, not a paradise lost. We fail to give ourselves credit for the magnitude of that achievement, and we focus far too readily on what we have not achieved. We never lost it: we just haven't won it yet.

What is at stake is fundamental to humanist anthropology. If human beings are still the desacralized fallen angels of the Renaissance (or the Enlightenment), then we are guilty about, and frustrated by, our failure to speak to each other. Peters suggests another way of living inside our skins: accepting the disjunctions and distances that separate people and reveling in the fragments of insight and communion that we do achieve. The insight is a keen and true one, though far from widely shared in a world still hypnotized by old myths. The theorists who have dominated humanistic discourse in literature and the arts have not yet taken up the opportunities and the challenge of enacting their ideas in the new, libertarian, but sometimes disorienting, dimensions of cyberspace.

Peters himself does less than one could hope to give his ideas wide currency. There is an academic flavor and curtailment about the book, with swatches of jargon and preciousness. A kind of intellectual center of gravity pulls us here into the American mid-nineteenth century and indeed to Melville—Bartleby is quoted on dead letters, and a collection of quotations from ancient and modern worthies at the end is attributed to a "sub-sub-librarian" who seems to have wandered in from the pages of *Moby-Dick*. But the whole never quite catches fire. Those who come to these pages will find them thought-provoking, intermittently delightful, and fundamentally sound; but, in the end, rather more didactic than illuminating.

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A Poet Parsed

READING RILKE:
REFLECTIONS ON THE PROBLEMS
OF TRANSLATION
By William H. Gass. Knopf. $25.

Reviewed by SUSAN MIRON

The devotee of Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926) who reads little or no German is inevitably faced with a dilemma when it comes to choosing among English editions of the diabolically elusive and allusive poetry, transplanted from its German source. Translations of Rilke proliferate—there are now at least fifteen in English of his masterpiece, "Duino Elegies," alone—so it takes a certain amount of hubris for a writer whose native language is English to attempt an improved interpretation.

The latest intrepid contender—essayist, philosopher, and novelist William Gass, who confesses that Rilke is "as close to me as any human being has ever been"—believes that the result of most translations is a record of the original, or, at best, a reading, but almost never a poem. Gass distills a lifetime of pondering Rilke into *Reading Rilke,* an unclassifiable mixture of biography, criticism of other translations of Rilke, and quirky stream-of-consciousness accounts of Gass's own battles both to translate and to elucidate the by-products of Rilke's poetic outbursts, when, at "great moments of white heat," he created "explosions of poetry."

Rilke's work, Gass acknowledges, has taught him "what real art ought to be; how it can matter to a life through its lifetime; how commitment can course like blood through the body of your words until the writing stirs, rises, opens its eyes; and finally, because his work allows me to measure what we call achievement: how tall his is, how small mine."

Gass is hardly the first to have fallen under the spell of Rilke's writing or persona, each of

Susan Miron, a concert harpist and book critic, writes widely on Eastern and Central European literature.

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which he describes with shrewdness and wit: "It's not been just the highborn women who have sewed a skirt around him, or written him loving letters, or offered him castle space, eager ears, and ceaseless devotion; who came to him as though they were soupless and he a kitchen. . . . [Rilke] studies have multiplied as if they had been introduced into a scholar-empty Australia; and dozens of translators have blunted their skills against his obdurate, complex and compacted poems, poems displaying an orator's theatrical power, while remaining as suited to a chamber and its music as a harpsichord: made of tough plucked sounds, yet as rapid and light and fragile as fountain water."

Gass gives a highly idiosyncratic, often entertaining reading of his hero's irritatingly termed "Lifeleading" (Gass defends his occasionally awkward Teutonic tics: "The German language, the German spirit, can and must compound"). Like Franz Kafka, perhaps the only German-language writer as resistant to translation, Rilke was born and raised in Prague by parents who hadn't the slightest notion of how to raise a pampered boy, "as sensitive to weather as a vane." Phia, Rilke's religiously fanatical mother—whom he would describe as "an empty-garmented ghost"—dressed, coddled, and coiffed René (his christened name) as a girl, instructing him to call his "good self" Sophie, presumably to remind her of the daughter she had lost before René was born. Rilke never forgave his mother what he described as her "scatterbrained piety" or her "pigheaded faith," yet he was strangely forgiving of his father, Josef, who shipped this former dollchild off to military school.

On the innumerable women in Rilke's life, Gass is insightful, especially so when the subject is the spectacular Lou Andreas-Salome, Rilke's quondam lover, sister/mother, and confidante (as well as muse to Freud and Nietzsche), "who seduced and abandoned with migratory regularity," and who, like Rilke, would "specialize in dumping" lovers (or, worse, in leaving them in the lurch).

Gass deftly covers the familiar geographic, artistic, and romantic Rilkean terrain—no small feat, and not a terrain that submits to facile summary. Rilke, to Gass, is a poet prone to being attacked by the Muse "the way storms lash rocky coasts," one who "felt himself to be a failure and a fraud except when he was writing . . . the writer who he wishes was the man he wasn't," who deftly reconciled the contradictions that afflicted him in poetry that is beguiling to readers, but teasingly tough, if not torturous, for translators.

It's Gass's running meditation on translating—"reading of the best, most essential kind"—that makes this book so valuable. Gass will no doubt infuriate those translators he so mercilessly assails (I am grateful that he has never seen the Rilke translations I slaved over for a year as an undergraduate), because he is so enticingly persuasive, and surprisingly hilarious. He's annoyed at those, like the translator Walter Arndt, who arrogantly deride other translators faced with a language that is not their native tongue. As for translators who veer off from the original and begin writing their own poems, he beseeches the Muses to "hurry them to their reward." What annoys Gass most are translators who don't take the trouble to understand the texts. "That," he huffs, "would interfere with their own creativity and with their perception of what the poet ought to have said. They do not wish to become the trumpet through which another's breath blows . . . and they would rather be original than right."

What's important to Gass is that the translator have a firm purchase on the language into which he is trying to put his chosen poem. "Forget the fact that the poem belongs in its body as utterly as you do in yours; listen to what's going on behind my tongue. . . . The translating reader reads the inside of the verse and sees, like the physician, either its evident health or its hidden disease." Gass implores the reader to *speak* these poems because they are "the most oral I know." The reader must "become" the poems, for they are, he insists, not really poems but miracles.

Gass, referring to himself in the third person, is as hard on Gass as he is on his competitors, offering the unsavory images of "flailing like someone drowning" while seeking an elusive word, and of "Gass, a jackal who comes along after the kill to nose over the uneaten hunks," cannibalizing the morsels that most appeal to him.

In the engaging chapter "Ein Gott Vermags," Gass dissects fifteen versions of three lines from the "Duino Elegies" (which appear in their entirety in Gass's intriguing translation at the book's end), starting with the plaintive opening line "*Wer, wenn ich schriee, hörte mich denn aus der Engel Ordnungen?*" with which the elegies, a dra-

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WITHOUT SCIENCE, RELIGION REVERTS TO SUPERSTITION

So taught the Hellenistic philosophy of Epicurus. He believed that truly useful religion—contributing peace of mind—comes by imagining deity as tranquil and not meddlesome in human affairs. Such deity cannot be imagined, however, unless one knows the limits of what is possible and what impossible, which can be learned only through the empirical study of nature.

Of all ancient philosophies Epicureanism is most comparable to modern physics and biology; for it, reality is that the essence of matter is atomic, and of living things, indeterministic and evolutionary—no Creator, no Providence in its worldview. Idealists (Platonists, Aristotelians, Stoics, Judaists)—who regard matter and life as initiated and governed by divine Intelligence—scorned such impious doctrine; scorned, too, Epicureans' ascribing laws and virtues to human rather than divine will. Epicureans said that primitive men initiated ethics when neighbors made compacts not to harm one another in person or property. This led to the precept that deceit must be avoided. Idealists held no such scruples; deception in the form of myth, poetry, and rhetoric served them as means to inculcate loyalty to deity, family, ruler, and to glorify pain as an aspect of such loyalty. Epicureans taught that by nature man avoids pain and seeks pleasure. Hence, idealists despised Epicureans as pleasuremongers and as threats to social order. Rabbis used "Epicurus!" as a curse word. Justin Martyr, an idealistic philosopher who became a Christian, thought that God used Plato, Stoics, poets, and historians—whatever they rightly said belonged to Christians too. But he excluded and condemned Epicureans.

Since Christianity was a blend of idealisms, one would think its founder, Jesus, rejected Epicureanism. Not so. According to Jack Hannah the biggest error perpetrated by well-intentioned, idealistically minded persons is the depiction of Jesus as an idealist. Ironically, it was an Epicurean spirit of critical scrutiny, reborn in the Enlightenment, that exposed the use of myth and rhetoric by the Evangelists in fabricating narratives about Jesus—their deceits so pervasive that attempts by various scholars to extract the historical Jesus from their Gospels yield Jesus as peasant revolutionary, Essene messianist, charlatan magician, Jewish Cynic . . . yet always as idealist, which Hannah says is historically questionable. Historicity can never be approached using the four Gospels of the New Testament as principal source.

Hannah has detected that a recently unearthed collection of 113 sayings of Jesus (the so called *Gospel of Thomas*) is a record that escaped alteration by writers under the influence of the four canonical Gospels; its sayings show them prior to rather than dependent on comparable canonical sayings. Their sequence corresponds chronologically to the *Gospel of Mark*'s course of events. This corroborates the claim made in the incipit to the *Gospel of Thomas* that its contents are remarks that puzzled Thomas, one of Jesus' students, who wrote them down. As student notes, taken at the time heard, of sayings not well understood, to be studied when there was leisure, the *Gospel of Thomas* affords verbatim data that are likely not contaminated by somebody's point of view. And since these notes are chronologically ordered, Hannah couples each with its associated context from Mark to construct a narrative. Given a context, the 113 sayings become more reliably interpretable. This narrative indicates that Jesus was oriented to Epicureanism and was not a believer in Judaism's teachings regarding God, messiahship, prophets, demons, circumcision, prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and food regimen. Probably his speaking in enigmatic "sound bites" hid from his disciples his favoring a philosophy that their Jewish religion despised. So what did Jesus think he could accomplish surreptitiously?

Just like Epicureans, Jesus was sensitive to the pain of his fellow man. Just as Epicureans did, Jesus administered maxims as verbal medicine for preventing or healing distress of mind caused by superstitious ideas about gods and death. When his disciples were anxious as to how they should observe certain everyday religious duties, he answered with the saying: "Do not speak a lie, and do not do what you hate." Another of his sayings: "You will not taste death," corresponds to the Epicurean: "Nothing expected in death," which is one of four principal "verbal medicines" that was administered to protect mental health. The difference in the way it is phrased suggests that, though Jesus mainly addressed Jews, he as well corrected Epicurean belief that death means annihilation. Hannah presents a case for Jesus' having transformed the Epicurean explanation of how immortal divine entities come to exist into an explanation of how an immortal entity that continues one's personal consciousness can emerge from material bodies.

You Will Not Taste Death: Jesus and Epicureanism by Jack Hannah
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matic inner monologue, announced themselves in a revelation to Rilke in 1912, "like a rattle in a hollow gourd," as he walked along the windswept edge of the Duino Castle cliffs in Switzerland. "They came to him as if they already existed—all ten—the way a mural might exist; but he sees, at first, only bits and pieces, obtains a brief glimpse, only to have them covered again," some for another ten years. After giving the dates of these translations and their versions, Gass tells how he reached his results. "Most of the translators here," he explains, "hold the right cards, but few know how to play them.... If we try to stay close to the immediate English sense of the German words, a nearly vomitous calamity results." He provides translational samplings of the famous opening line of the elegies, which he renders as *Who, if I cried, would hear me among the Dominions of Angels?* Among the others are Boney (1957): *Who of the angels hosts would hear me if I cried out?;* MacIntyre (1961): *Who, if I shouted, among the hierarchy of angels would hear me?;* and Cohn (1989): *Who, if I cried out, might hear me—among the ranked angels?*

As a study of translating (or "transreading," as Gass dubs it), this book is a joy, and often a revelation. A lifetime of Rilke-reading (these Teutonic tics are contagious) has served Gass well, enabling him to transmogrify Rilke's oracular utterances into a spellbinding poem that brings us tantalizingly close to the elegies' doleful heart.

We call to the attention of our readers the following titles, published in 1999, portions of which first appeared in our pages: *Credo,* by Brian Doyle (St. Mary's Press); *The Best American Essays 1999,* introduction by Edward Hoagland (Houghton Mifflin); *Invisible Forms: A Guide to Literary Curiosities,* by Kevin Jackson (Picador); *The Diary of Vaslav Nijinsky,* edited by Joan Acocella (Farrar, Straus and Giroux); *The Nothing That Is: A Natural History of Zero,* by Robert Kaplan (Oxford); *The Mercy,* by Philip Levine (Knopf); *Blessings the Body Gave,* by Walter McDonald (Ohio State); *The Father of the Predicaments,* by Heather McHugh (Wesleyan); *Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America,* by Jennifer Price (Basic Books); and *Rembrandt's Eyes,* by Simon Schama (Knopf).

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THE READER REPLIES

GOING UP TO OXFORD

Thank you for another wonderful issue. I particularly enjoyed Renée Fox's essay on her year as Eastman Professor at Balliol College. She described Oxford from an American point of view, but with a generous amount of gentle respect. Splendid!

BRENDA LAYMAN
Pickerington, Ohio

REMEMBER THIS

Kate Cambor's provocative discussion of what we recall and don't recall suggests further examples of other mnemonic feats. She cites the sixteenth-century Dutch philologist Scaliger, who memorized all of Homer in three weeks. This brings to mind the work of the theatrical actor who routinely memorizes, and must nightly recall, all the lines of a given character. In a one-character drama like *The Belle of Amherst,* about the life of Emily Dickinson, the actress must remember not only every word in the play, but also all the gestures, expressions, and actions that make the character real.

Despite the computer abilities Cambor discusses, human memory is still astounding. Until his last encounter with IBM's Deep Blue, the world chess champion Gary Kasparov was able to defeat the biggest and fastest computer that man had devised. Many Grand Masters have stunned us by playing simultaneous games while blindfolded, remembering the position of chessmen on each board. This shows the power of the sixty-four dark and light squares on the board as a mnemonic device. Blindfolded masters like Janos Flesch (Budapest, 1960) could mentally park each piece, board by board, keeping as many as fifty-two of them correctly sequenced in visualized memory. True, most of Flesch's opponents were little above amateur ability. The most memorable such event may have happened in 1902, when Harry Nelson Pillsbury played twenty-one blindfold games with opponents who approached him in mastery. He drew eleven, won three, lost seven. These examples confirm the power of Cambor's subject: the definitive humanness of memory.

BRICE FARWELL
Ashland, Oregon

ACUPUNCTURE IN THE OPERATING ROOM

Acupuncture "anesthesia," as described by Dr. Sherwin Nuland, is not a marvelous phenomenon from the mysterious Orient. Equal or better anesthesia is observed as a product of religious and political rites, hypnosis, battle, sporting events, and even simple distraction. Moreover, every imaginable form of electrode and all forms of electricity have been advertised as treatments of pain since the time of Franklin and Volta. So-called electro-anesthesia was reinvented in the 1960s and discarded.

Nearly anyone can block pain from his mind if he tries. For example, I have tolerated simple surgery and dental procedures without anesthesia simply by reflecting that the pain is nothing compared to the tortures of being a married man and father of three bright daughters.

JOHN D. GRIFFITH, M.D.
Houston, Texas

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The Podium

Sidewise

JILL McCORKLE

I often tell people that I do not come from a long line of literary women, but I do come from a long line of creative ones. The difference is that instead of taking the form of a book neatly shelved, their creations were promptly devoured, or washed threadbare over the next year, or simply given over to the air in the form of a story. I think of the way my mother tells stories as the meandering method, which goes something like this: *I can't wait to tell you what happened to poor Betty Russell* (there's the hook), *but first let me remind you that her daddy is the one who owned the old hardware store that used to be where the Winn-Dixie is now. You remember everybody in town thought he burned down his own building, claiming that he'd never been right since his wife—not Betty's mama, she died early of cancer—his* second *wife took off to Texas never to be heard from again, well, anyway, Betty was on her way to . . .* You get the point. What I learned early on is that when you finally hear what happened to poor Betty, it probably isn't nearly as good as all the stories around it. The place. The history. The local color. I used to think it was a Southern thing, but then I met my mother-in-law from Brooklyn, who is a master of the meandering method. Then I thought perhaps it belonged to women, but I quickly brushed aside that sexist thought. There are far too many fine male storytellers for that to be so, my father topping the list, in my own experience, as the king of "What if . . . " My dad could take the most benign situation and find every potential horror lurking at the edges. From him I learned the importance of studying a story from every angle, which of course means relying on all the stories pulled in from the sides.

—from a talk on storytelling given at Mohonk Mountain House, New Paltz, New York, November 12, 1999

Jill McCorkle is the author of five novels, most recently *Tending to Virginia* and *Carolina Moon*. Her stories are collected in *Crash Diet* and *Final Vinyl Days*. She currently teaches at Bennington College and lives near Boston.

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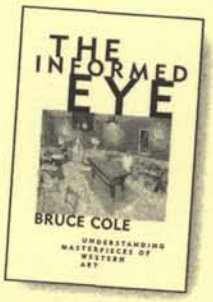
BRUCE COLE

The Informed Eye



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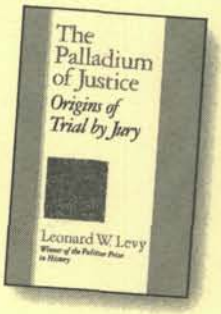

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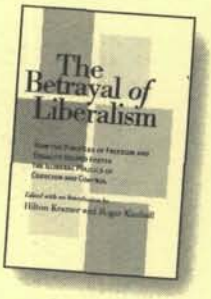
HILTON KRAMER AND ROGER KIMBALL, EDITORS

The Betrayal of Liberalism



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